Oral History Number: 098-038, 039  
Interviewee: Maurice Powers  
Interviewer: Mary Murphy  
Date of Interview: April 17, 1980  
Project: Butte Oral History Collection

There are several unidentified speakers throughout. They are not sufficiently distinguishable voices to warrant distinct labels, so they have all been labeled as Unidentified Speaker. They are all peripheral, and Mary Murphy conducts the bulk of the interview.

Mary Murphy: When did your family first come to Butte?

Maurice Powers: I'm not sure.

MM: They were from...?

MP: Before 1900. My father was from Castletown Berehaven. My mother was from right outside of Castletown, in the county of Kerry. She’s from Ross (?). My father came out here first...no, I guess my mother got here first. She was a brilliant woman. She taught school when she was 12 years old. She only went four years to school. She knew algebra. She knew everything. Poetry, my god...I've been trying to trace down some of them poems that she used to say to us when she was putting us to sleep. I can't find them. I thought maybe that an ignorant Irish girl came out here. She picked up some poem book and found all of this stuff, but no. They're by different authors, and I can't find it.

I was born up on Minah Street. 118 Minah.

MM: What year were you born?

MP: I was born in 1909. December 29, 1909.

MM: My birthday's December 29.

MP: Well...(laughs) I had four brothers and two sisters. One of my brothers died real young. My father got killed.

MM: How did he get killed?

MP: I don't want to put that on tape. Is that on tape now?

MM: Here, I can...
MP: My mother went out in the restaurants and raised six of us.

MM: She went out and worked in the restaurants.

MP: She worked in the restaurants. She worked scrubbing floors, scrubbing stairs, doing the damn rooming houses, and everything else. I never went to high school. Since I was able, I was working. I worked when I was nine years old.

MM (and Unidentified Speaker): Where?

MP: Never bothered me. I worked...set pins in the bowling alley. I herded cows out Porphyry Street. I worked cleaning John Curtis’...Johnny and George Curtis, they were multi-millionaires in Butte. They’re mother used to like to milk her own cows. She had four cows. I used to get up in the morning before school, and go over there at six o’clock in the morning, clean out that cow barn, get them cows ready to milk, and help the old lady with the milking. I’d bring in all of the coal and wood. At night, I had to be there again. In the summertime, I used to herd them cows out to where the Community Hospital is now. There was a gulch, and they used to feed along there. I worked from the time I was nine years old, and everyone in my family went to school but me.

MM: Where you the oldest?

MP: I was the oldest boy. I had two sisters older than me.

MM: Did your mother ever re-marry?

MP: No. There was only one man in my mother’s life. Try to compare anybody to him. She couldn’t.

MM: Were they married in Ireland, or...?

MP: They were married at the Sacred Heart Church in Butte. I didn’t finish telling you about my mother. She had beautiful handwriting. Like I say, she was a brilliant woman. I never met another woman as smart as her. She used to be writing letters to her uncle in San Francisco. He was in that Comstock Lode. He was a foreman. He lived in San Francisco. He was pretty well off, I guess. He was living cousins, more cousins of ours. I don’t know who they were, nothing else.

My mother, when she was 12 years old...she had lost her father. She was trying to help raise her two brothers. She had an aunt in Australia. She wrote to her aunt, and told her she’d give her the ranch if she’d come up there and take care of her brothers. He sent for her. He said, “You come out here, Mary. You’re going to be educated.” But he bragged about her too much.
in that house. While she was on ship coming to this country, he was blown to pieces. Those people that she went to live with were jealous and didn’t like her in the first place.

As soon as she was...she knew my old man. He was a little younger than her in fact. The only way she...she left Frisco. When she came out to Butte, she worked as a waitress in the Barona and the old Big Ship.

Unidentified Speaker: Where was that?

MP: Where was the Barona?

US: On Mercury and Gaylord?

MP: Somewhere on the east side there. I don’t know for sure. I didn’t pay any attention to where they were. I knew how to find them.

US: That’s the one the called the Big Ship.

MP: The Big Ship was on Broadway.

US: Broadway.

MP: She worked at the Big Ship and at the Barona. Then she went to work for some Jews. There’s a doctor in Butte by that name. I wonder if he’s a relative. A Jewish name...Rosenthal. There’s a new doctor in Butte by that name.

US: Dentist.

MP: A dentist or something. If you ever see him, ask him if his great-grandparents are...Anyway, East Granite Street was the elites at that time. West side wasn’t the big shots, then.

US: Really?

MP: You bet. These Rosenthals lived up on East Granite. My mother was working there when she married the old man. She used to feed them kids pork when the folks were out. They’d leave her with Mary. They’d be telling their mother, “Mary fixed us a wonderful meal.” She used to feed them pork chop. She told us these things later. She died in ’59. We had it rough and I enjoyed every minute of it. I only wish I could have done more for my mother.

US: What school did you go to?

MP: I was in the reform school. I was in St. Mary’s, St. Patrick’s, St. John’s, St. Joseph’s, and I was in the reform school.
US: Which reform school is that?

MP: They had one in Butte.

US: Name it.

MP: Oh Christ...

US: What was the name of it?

MP: What the hell did they call it? They tore it down to make room for the airport.

US: Cleveland.

MP: Cleveland!

US: Was it a regular school of the Butte school system? Did they put the tough kids there or what?

MP: Any kid that played hooky...you might be looking for your kid. He’s two days out in the hooky school; they wouldn’t even notify you. We called it a hooky school. The mush hops. We ate mush mostly.

MM: Did you have to live there, or did they...?

MP: You couldn’t get out. They shaved your head and everything else. Three months I spent.

MM: How old were you then?

MP: Eleven or something like that. I don’t remember. I went through school eight years. I raised hell. I bumped into the wrong teacher at the wrong time, and I hated school from then on out. That was an Irish sister. She gave me a bad time from the first day she met me because I was too much smarter than her high class students from St. Patrick’s School. I moved down from St. Mary’s, one year of reference (?) from St. Mary’s. She wrecked me as far as school was concerned. After I got out of the hooky school and everything, I went out to St. John’s. I made up my mind, I’m going to make it (unintelligible). I drove that sister to drink I think. (laughs) She was a great little person. The last day of school, I went up and I told her, “Sister, I’m sorry for all the bad times I gave you.”

She bust crying; she said, “Maurice, I always knew you’d do that.”

Sister Mary Paulo (?). I graduated from St. John’s.

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Here’s some more history of Butte. You heard of Muckerville?

US: Never.

MP: That’s up on North Montana Street, Virginia Street, and all of them.

US: That’s Muckerville?

MP: It was named by a Catholic sister.

MM: How come?

MP: In school, she said, “You guys are nothing but a bunch of muckers.” She said, “You’d sooner trip a woman and watch her fall on her face than you would go and pick her up.” So we called ourselves the Muckers. We played football as the Muckers. I was fullback. I was the pitcher for their baseball team. When Kevin Shannon was on...did you see him on TV? Did you meet Kevin?

MM: No, I’ve got to...

MP: You’ve got to meet him. He’s a character. He mentioned Muckerville. He said, “There used to be neighborhoods there in Butte: Habitation (?), Centerville, McQueen, Walkerville.” They had independent football. It was semi-pro. We used to kill each other.

US: I’ve got a question for you on that. You said that that’s not Manigault (?) Hill.

MP: No. Manigault Hill is up on top of Dublin Gulch.

US: I thought that was Hungry Hill.

MP: Hungry Hill, that’s right. They called it Manigault Hill too, I think. Maybe they called this Manigault Hill. I never...

US: Is there another name for that hill?

MP: Idaho Hill. You know how steep Idaho is?

US: It goes straight up, Idaho.

MP: Idaho Hill was all I ever heard it called. Manigault Hill, I heard, but I always thought they meant Hungry Hill...there were a lot of people up there one time. That was number one precinct in Butte. That was the biggest precinct in the state. It went from where we were up on
Woolman Street, all the way up in that area. There were lots of people up there. Different nationalities lived in different places.

MM: Did different nationalities get along okay, or was there a lot of fighting?

MP: There was some fighting at first, but they all got along after. Most of the English kids up in our neighborhood were great runners.

US: They had to...

MP: They had to run like hell. (laughs) They either could hide like hell, or run. But they got along good. My mother got recipes off of an English woman, and she gave them recipes. She used to make the best pasties you ever ate.

MM: When you were a kid...was that when you were talking about the miners that would sit around and sing...

MP: Yes, I was only five years old then.

MM: But you remember those...

MP: I remember when I was three.

MM: Really?

MP: That’s right. I tell my sister stuff that happened when I was three years old, and she couldn’t remember (unintelligible). I got a pretty good memory.

MM: I’d like to hear some of those songs again.

MP: I don’t really...

MM: If you remember what one of the verses was that you sang...

US: Just one verse.

MP: (singing) “When you were a miner, and on a water-liner, and threw away your mucker suit, the shift boss used to talk to you like to any other brute, until you learned to run the big machine.” That was to the tune of “When You Are a Tool”.

The other one, I just remember a part of that. “I worked for Fat Jack when I first came to Butte. To hell with the timber, throw some muck in the chute.” He was riding them pretty hard. Am I on that now? Am I on that?
MM: Yes.

MP: Oh dear. (laughs) There’s another good song.

MM: What’s that?

MP: Kevin knows that better than I do. He knows the start of it. I don’t know the start of it. This mine opened, the Diamond Mine. Do you know where that is? (singing) “There’s miners from Bigby and more from Paiute...with a burly arm to bar down the chute. And the big bellied Dutchman from over the Rhine was swinging the muck in the big Diamond Mine. There was miners and makers and tinkers and swampers all up at the Diamond and rushing for jobs. I got me a job on the first day of May. Four and a quarter he said was my pay. I worked six months and I dragged my time. To hell with Johnny Norton and the big Diamond Mine.”

MM: That’s a great one.

US: Who was Johnny Norton?

MP: He was the foreman of the mine. When I first went to work, after I got out the eighth grade down on the flat...we moved back up in the old neighborhood. Practically in the neighborhood. We lived up on Boardman Street—115 Boardman. As soon as I was 16, I got a rustling card. I went to work at the Tramway.

US: That would have been what year?

MP: ’26. The company got me down for ’27. They gypped me out of a year there, but 1926 I was working at the Tramway. I weighed 111 pounds. At the rustling card office, I told them I was 135. They didn’t weigh me, and I thought, boy, I sure got by with a fast one. You used to have to get a rustling card. The rustling card office was on North Main Street at that time. I went to work at the Tramway dumping waste. These slimes they used to put out the fires there. That’s the tailings from these slime pounds around Butte. They use them to choke out the fire. Whether you know it or not, that whole hill is burning. I was in there. It was red hot. We’re handling them damned cars with wet sacks. I thought I went straight to hell, and the only reason I stayed there was because there was other people there. My head was aching. They dump these slimes. They’d stick in the car, and they’d set. Somebody would have to pick it all out. Tough.

I stayed a while again on motor. Motor jobs were just as tough as anything else. They say motor, and you think you’re sitting in a motor, but that’s not true. I’d loaded some cars inside and was going to pick them up outside. I was swamping on the motor, and I signaled them back. We had carbide lights then. I signaled them back. He’s supposed to go the way you signal: slow if you signal slow; if you give coming back, come back. I signaled slow. He come back, and he hit
them other cars. He threw a car of rock on top of my leg. It got me pinned against a post with the damn car of rock there. A ton of rock in the car and another half-ton. It was on me, and he ran to the station for help.

A little guy came out walking out there, heading to the station to get something. He said, “My God, kid, your legs.”

I said, “Can you help me get it off?”

By God, him and I got that car off me. When they brought me out to the station on the timber truck, they put me on the cage on top of a loaded skip, and sent me to surface sitting on a box, a powder box. That goddamn cage went up through there rattling the door. I’m going all around the goddamn deck.

Anyway, I got up. They brought me up to the hospital, Marie Hospital. I lived right behind it. My mother and them lived...This was before I got married. I was only 16. My mother and them lived at 30 West Copper. I could look out the window. I could see them, but my mother never knew it. I always hid it. I could look out the window, and I could see my brothers not going up the steps. I thought What the hell did they do? Divorce me or what? My mother didn’t know where I was at. The damn time keeper didn’t have me reported off. Didn’t say I was hurt. Called up the mines. Called up all over. I was mad when I went to work. I was trying to get a dollar off of her, and she wouldn’t give it to me. Why the hell would I get drunk like the rest of the guys at night coming off shift? She thought maybe I’d done that. Called up jail, and called up everyplace. There was nobody.

Finally, there was a cousin of mine time keeping at the Tramway. She got a hold of him. He said, “Mary, Mrs. Powers, your son is the hospital right up there by you. He got hurt last night.”

I’m up in the miners’ ward. There was beds all over. I splintered a bone is all I did. I splintered it on the side. I didn’t break the leg, but I splintered the bone. Knock on the side of the car hit me there. I just bummed a cigarette from this big red-headed nurse from Anaconda. She looked to see me puffing away right here at my mother. “Take that cigarette out of your mouth, boy!” My mother (unintelligible)...

My brother came up to see me first, my youngest brother. I said, “For Christ’s sake, go down to the restaurant to get me food.” My sister run the restaurant there. “Go down there and get me a big steak, will you, or something? I’m starving in here. I’ll spring you a package of cigs on the Q.T.”

He left, and then my mother walked in. She could lambast me in the hospital. She said, “Where’d you get the cigarette?”

The nurse said, “I gave it to him.”

Maurice Powers Interview, OH 098-038, 039, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
“Don’t you ever give him another!” she said.

The nurse thought it was funny: here I was working in the mines, and I couldn’t even smoke. Anyway, I got better.

The Tramway, I worked there about six or eight months, I guess. I went to the Anaconda mine. I hired out for a contract mucker. Them days to be a contract mucker in Butte, you were sunk. I wanted a job, and I tried to hire out for everything else. He wouldn’t hire me doing a day’s pay job, so I hired out for a contract mucker. I went down in the mine. I went in with a little, short Irishman: a pair of shoulders about so big. He was short, but one of the best muckers on the Butte hill. I’m in there staying with him as much as I could. I threw up in that muck pile. I fell in it. I heaved. But I still kept mucking.

The boss came in. I was slight. I never grew until I was 16, or started growing until I was 16. The boss came in, and he said, “Kid, this is going to kill you. You can’t take this.”

I said, “I need a job.”

He said, “How about going dumping out in the station? Try it.” He said, “It’s awfully heavy work, but you seem pretty wiry. Maybe you can handle it.”

I went out there, and I worked for about nine months.

US: What does that entail?

MP: You take the cars, run them up to the skip hub, and dump them in the pot. You had to pull them back in the chute. You get three or four hundred cars a shift. Then I’d get down on the grizzly and pick the waste. The grizzlies are iron rigs that are set there to keep the big stuff from going down. You had to sort it all out. You had a car in front of you to throw the waste in. Just the ore went down. It was tough, and it was hot in that goddamn station. My partner passed out, Packy Buckley. I don’t know whether he threw a whiskey fit, or whether the heat got him, but he had his hand cocked behind his neck. He was down, and I was throwing him all over the station trying to loosen that hand. I thought he choked himself because his arm was stiff. The bosses came out. I told them there was something wrong with the (unintelligible). That was Packy Buckley that runs the...

US: Yes, I know Packy.

MP: His uncle, The Fudger Buckley. Talk about a character. There was one. Anyway, it was epileptic fit he had. If I remember, The Fudger was laying there, and they were trying to bring him out of it. I had thrown all the coats on there. I heard you’re always supposed to keep a fellow warm when he had a fit. One guy was trying to force me to give him ice water, and I told
him that I didn’t think that was good for him. He was just going to pour some ice water in when the safety first man came down the mine. He said, “What are you trying to do with that. He’s trying to kill that man. He’s got to throw that out.” He gave him spirits eau-de-vie and I guess it tastes like whiskey. Once you took a shot of eau-de-vie, you shouldn’t take any once more. Anyway, that was the last shift The Fudger would ever run. They would never allow him to go in to run again.

From there, they put me and my partner up on the twenty-hundred. I was working on the 22 with The Fudger. I went on a motor. I went with Sid Bynum, Richie Bynum, in the mucker saddle. In the east side, it was a hot, goddamn place we were pulling out of. On the west side, they call that the valley. It was nice and cool. There’s the kind of places we were. Most of that was stoked out from below, the valley. Straight and south was a door going into old Belmont workings—the Belmont mines. Then we went out to the north to go up in the shaft. The shaft was on the north end.

Mary, did you read *Mile High Mile Deep*?

MM: Yes.

MP: That’s a goddamn story that I ever lived that day.

MM: You mean when he was talking about getting lost in the...

MP: Yes, because I took the guy that got lost.

MM: What happened?

MP: This kid’s name was Bolo Salvine (?) that was lost. Is Roger Salvine still around Butte? Did you ever hear of him? That was his brother. We had to wait on the switch until the other motor come in. Just before we’d go out, it’d crowd the station. We had train loaded with rock (?) and we’re standing there, kind of cooling off. There was a little breeze there. We’re sopping wet. We cooled off. They had him reported off. Some time keeper had reported him off. His folks were looking for him and everything. We were told to just an eye out for him. He might be around someplace.

They gave him a job to help the miners up at the stoke. He was kind of an errand boy. It was a big stoke. They set him out for something, or he was supposed to help out. He could hoist their timber to them or something. He had just started. He hadn’t been in the mines long. He was older than I was. He was about 19. They sent him out after something and he never came back. They thought he went up and quit. They didn’t pay any more attention. Carbide lamps in them days. We’re sitting there, talking, and I said, “Wait a minute. What if Bolo took that turn into the Mull (?) workings”—they’re gassy and they’re hot—“instead of taking that door. There’s a door there and a door there.

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We went down there. We opened the door, and we knew damn well that he was in there. We could see his footprints. Then we could see his handprints. The poor bugger was crawling around there in the dark. His light had gone off. He crawled up to that door in that mud, and he was drinking copper water. We had old trolley motors in them days. They were only about that high, and then we had a trolley on them. They were flat. So we got him, and he was crazy.

MM: How long had he been in there?

MP: Three days. He was crazier than a bed bug. We had to tie him down on top of the motor to bring him out. He was trying to bite us and everything. He come out of it, but he lost all of his teeth.

US: From the copper water?

MP: Yes. He was ruined. I don’t know if he lived too long afterwards, but they gave him a job as a machinist’s helper on the hill for a while, to keep everything quiet. Bolo was never no good anymore. That’s where that guy lied about that, and what he says about the dog nails (?)...he told many lies in that book. I’m going to write a book. I’m going to correct it.

From the Anaconda, I went to the Stewart. They hired me to skin the mule. That is, drive the mule. They killed the mule that day and I didn’t have to. I was glad because I didn’t know how to put the harness on it. I went to work on the 2300 of the Stewart, on the motor. I stayed there...I was 18 years old—1928. They came out with the train and we used to put rock on it. We were good at it.

I was working with a big guy, Jack Labelle. He used to be a bouncer around Butte in them days, a big, rough character. Him and I were buddies. We used to fight like hell. I weighed 170 pounds. I had picked up that much weight in just a short time. Labelle was about 230, I guess. God, he had (unintelligible)...a little shorter than I. We get to mauling each other down the mine. He was full of black hair. I’d pull that black hair out of him, and there’d be black hair all over that damn place. We’d get each other down. All of the miners thought we were fighting. We were playing! We’d beat each other to a pulp. We’d never punch each other in the face, but on the shoulders and on the arms, the ribs, and the belly—anyplace. But we never hit each other in the face. Some of the miners would be hollering for him, and some would be hollering for me. They thought we were fighting. We’d go through that every day. We used to murder each other. I could throw him every time because he had small feet for a big man. I had better balance. The fight would start until we hit the ground with our shoes off.

I worked there. The Stewart went down in 1930. I was transferred to the Tramway. I got in a beef with the boss down there, and I quit. The Depression started, no jobs, and I told him to shove it. Big Labelle was supposed to dump at the station. Like I say, he was kind of doing a
good piece, so he asked me if I’d take the job. I traded him. I was supposed to go on the motor. I left without running the motor, and I went dumping.

Big Ray Lough(?) was a shift boss, a great big guy. He used to play football at Englewood. I’d play with the Gulch. They’d be down there raising hell up on the goddamn Gulch. They broke some guy’s neck from the other team, which will happen to any football gang. They were raising hell up at the Gulch, and I ran them off. Told me, “It could have happened to anybody.”


This damn guy pulls out at noontime with a train of rock. When they pulled out, we were supposed to help them and everything, but we were eating out dinner. It was dinner time. He was supposed to be pulling up, and he turned around. He could have went and ate his dinner; pulled it out after. He was working with Labelle was the worst of it. Labelle was partners with him. Here he pulled out at noontime. He said, “Unhook the motor.”

I said, “Unhook it yourself. We’re eating dinner.”

Me and my partner were sitting there eating dinner. I said, “Unhook the damn thing yourself; we’re eating dinner.”

He got out and we started arguing. I went after him. I went to punch the hell out of him. Big Labelle grabbed me. We started the same old stuff again. First, I was mad, and then here we are getting into the same old stuff again. Everybody thought we were fighting again. His partner thought we had a hell of a fight. My partner did too. We went back inside.

Later, we came out. After dinner, we came out. The shift boss came out, and he said, “How’s the pugilist?” “When the motorman comes out here,” he said, “you unhook that train.”

I said, “I was eating dinner. They’re not supposed to pulling out here at dinner time.” I said, “So you heard about it? There’s a goddamn stoolpigeon that couldn’t keep his mouth shut. That’s one of your boys, I guess.” I said, “To hell with you, to hell with Englewood, and to hell with this job.” (unintelligible).

He begged me to stay. I could do my work with him. I wouldn’t stay, so I quit.

I went to work out at the Orphan Girl. You know where the mining museum is?

MM: Yes.

MP: There’s a picture of me in the Orphan Girl there someplace. I worked there. There was a strike in ’34. In the meantime, the miners’ union started organizing again.
US: When? When did they start organizing?

MP: ‘33.

US: You weren’t in a union then up until that time.

MP: There was no union. I’m telling you, you ought to have seen the conditions underground before we got a union. If I didn’t like you, you would clean the dust. I don’t care what kind of work you were doing. If somebody had a quart of wine of something, you were fired when you got on top. This other guy’s (unintelligible). There was no way to come back at all. Dusty and dirty. If you can imagine it, there was only a few mines working in ‘34. In fact, the Orphan Girl had just opened up. In ‘33 (unintelligible)...In the meantime, I had worked in the damn restaurant for a while.

MM: Really?

MP: I worked for the Main Grill. I worked with Blanche Copenhaver. I worked for my sister out in the kitchen. Then I went to work out at the Orphan Girl.

I helped organize the miners’ union. I heard they were organizing. I went to all my friends. I hauled them all off to the union. My card number was 89 in that union. My friends’ numbers were younger than mine because I signed up late. After I sent them off to the line, I signed up. Then I went out and organized a bunch more.

The boat came, and we struck. There was five or six hundred men rustling in each mine. They were driving in men like dogs. Guys went two men in a drift. They’d break a drift round. Drift is a...they’re drifting on the ore. They’d muck out that round.

[End of Tape 1, Side A]
MP: That’s how bad the conditions were when we organized.

US: They are bad?

MP: Terrible. Some of those mines, you couldn’t live in.

US: From the stuff I’ve been reading, some of the people have been saying that the mines were real bad when they used to have dry mining, but, once they got the water, then everything was fine.

MP: That’s a damn lie! I tell you the mine was the worst dust goddamn thing I ever seen in my life, long after we had water in the ‘50s and ‘60s. I worked there too. I straightened out some of the conditions there too, but not long enough. As soon as I’d get moved...they’d move me to another place and there’d be dust there again. While I was working there, I’d make them clean it up, make them put some water on it. My God, you couldn’t live there. I think that’s where I got most of my dust: the Kelly mine.

US: Is it bad anymore, do you think?

MP: Sure it’s bad. Ask Clemmons (?). It’s damn bad. The legislature won’t...

Anyway, I went from the Orphan Girl...I got transferred...from the Orphan Girl down to the Anselmo. I worked at the Anselmo. I worked in a fire drift. We were working right in on a fire. We had a candle. If the candle went out, we had to get out. We had a big door on a cement frame behind. They said to get out if you can, and shut that door. I developed an ulcer from drinking ice water and salt pills. (unintelligible) when you went in there. Pretty soon, you couldn’t sweat no more. You were ready to go. I went from 196 pounds down to a 170 in no time. Me and Smitty were drifting there. Smitty looked like a shadow too.

I went up and I told them. I went to the hospital. The goddamn fool down at the hospital took me for pleurisy. I said, “I have don’t have no goddamn pleurisy.” I went to Nahakta (?), an old doctor that was in Butte. He went over my stomach like this. He said, “You’ve got a big ulcer right there.” I looked at him. I could eat horse shoes. Nothing bothered me before that. He said, “Don’t take my word for it. Go have a fluoroscope by them doctors. You’re paying hospitalization.”

I went up and they didn’t want to do it. “We see no indication of an ulcer.” So I went to the union. They told them to fluoroscope my stomach. Big ulcer.

MM: How long did that strike in ’34 last?

Maurice Powers Interview, OH 098-038, 039, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
MP: Five months.

MM: Was that mostly to get recognition for the union?

MP: For recognition. They had scabs from this town. They had gunmen from Chicago. The armored car is still in Butte.

US: Yes. That’s what they used in the ’34 strike?

MP: That’s right. That was brought in by Chicago gangsters. I tried to break that windshield.

MM: Where was that?

MP: Up on Copper Street. I used to pitch. Naturally, I had a pretty good arm. They told me about this unbreakable glass. I said, “No goddamn glass I ever seen I couldn’t throw through.” Right off the corner of Copper and Main. There’s a dead man in that yard. It’s just cement. It’s a pipe full of cement. They call it a dead man. You want to tie something to it. We put a cable on it. The car used to come up and come over Copper Street to go up to the Stewart. We spotted it a way down. We run, and we got the goddamn cable ready. We pulled it across the street. I went right in front of it. I had a bolt...a square nut. It must have weighed a whole half pound. I stood in front of that goddamn thing, and I let fly as hard as I could. That bolt pretty near knocked my head off coming back. I think they had to change that windshield, though, after because I hit that pretty goddamn hard. We couldn’t do anything with it.

There was a guy who was a bartender just around that time. He had worked the mines. He’s still around—a pretty rough guy yet.

US: What’s his name?

MP: I don’t know if I should mention his name. He may be in good with the company. I don’t know. He was walking down Main Street. There’s four of us coming down behind him. The rest of them are dead now: Eddie Lyons, I...there was four of us, anyway, going down the street. Clowney (?) was walking ahead of us...this is the guy. I shouldn’t have told you his name. He had a newspaper in his pocket. He had just gotten out of church. It was Sunday.

Here some of them gangsters come in from Chicago in the car, and they come over to the street. They stop for Main Street just as Clowney hit the corner. One of them rolled down the window, “You one of them tough Butte miners? You don’t look very tough.” Clowney dragged out the newspaper and shoved it right in his face. They started piling out of the car, and, boy, we came after them. They jumped in the car, and they went over and wheeled in front of the Hennessey Building. The gunman from the company got around them, so they (unintelligible) the goddamn guns.
They went in the side. While they were in there, we flattened the tires. We punctured the tires. They came out and they climbed in the car. They never noticed the tires. They started over Granite Street. They started up Wyoming. We were hanging on the back of the damn thing. All of the people around the street were looking on. These tires start flapping. (laughs) We stopped them dead in front of the Butte Berry (?). They had these short clubs like a piece of a baseball bat. They weren’t quite as big around, but they were heavy. Like a pool cue.

MM: Like a black jack?

MP: Big clubs. A black jack is short. These were regular wooden clubs loaded with lead. They start climbing out of the car using them clubs. I got on top of the car. I got one of them clubs. The guy sticks it out like this. “Get out!” I grabbed it and whacked him. They start shooting. They shot the police car. They shot the windows on the police car. The cops had come up there. We turned over the car. Somebody threw a match and burnt that damn thing right there. All of the windows in the Butte Berry were gone out. That was a hell of a mess there.

US: When was that?

MP: ’34. We had a hell of a time, I tell you. ’34, they had these characters inside the fence. We were trying to get at them and (unintelligible). They put up big canvases so that you couldn’t throw rocks in there. I made these flippers. The pickets had these flippers...we’d shoot one of these steely marbles in or a rock. We had a lot of fun.

US: Who did they have working in there? Who was scabbing?

MP: Some from right here. Have you seen that scab list of ’34?

US: Were some of them people that worked for ACM [Anaconda Copper Mining], like company clerks and stuff like that?

MP: No. Some of them stayed.

US: Because they’d lose their jobs, right, if they...they weren’t union organized.

MP: We weren’t organized or nothing then. Those ten men held that charter from the Western Federation [of Miners] days.

MM: Those ten men held it for that whole time? They started the...?

MP: Miller McFlanagan was one of them. Johnny Grace was another one. I don’t know who all...

US: Any of them fellows still around, you suppose?

Maurice Powers Interview, OH 098-038, 039, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
MP: I think Johnny Grace is around.

US: (unintelligible)

MP: McFlanagan’s been dead for years. Not Richie, Richie’s just a kid.

US: Lou ain’t dead though.

MP: The old man.

US: The old man.


US: But Johnny Grace, you think, would still be around.

MP: You know Richie Grace in Butte?

US: Dick Grace?

MP: Yes, this would be his uncle—Johnny Grace. He was one of the guys that held that charter. Anyway, in ‘34... where’d I leave off? I got transferred to the Tramway, and then I went to the Orphan Girl. I worked there seven years. I worked there first until the strike. Then I went back there after the strike. I transferred to the Anselmo...No, I got transferred to the West Calusa. I worked at the West Calusa. I worked down there until that went down. I went to the work at the Leonard; the Leonard went down. I left and went to Nevada. I worked in the mines in Nevada.

MM: Why did you leave?

MP: There was no mines working. I came back, and there were no mines working yet. ’37. They were all down. Very few men working. There was a few. I went to work for a while. The only reason I came back: my mother was dying. I was in good down around Nevada. I worked a mine there, and I could have played baseball. I had a chance to baseball and everything down there; a chance to go be a plumber, learn the plumbing trade. I had quite a few chances down there.

Anyway, I left there when my mother got bad. I came back up. There was no work. I went to work on the goddamn railroad. I was a (unintelligible) for a while. They were mucking out a tunnel that was filled in by a flood. I went to work there for a while, not very long. The Orphan Girl opened. I went back out there. I worked there until 1940. I got transferred to the Travona.

US: What was at Travona? What kind of ore was the Travona doing then?
MP: Manganese. You were cleaner coming up than you were going down. They make face butter out of that. Clean.

US: Wasn’t that silver before?

MP: That was one of the highest gold and silver. Orphan Girl was gold and silver. All the top of Butte was gold and silver.

US: When you got down below...

MP: Down below you hit the copper.

MM: When they would transfer you to a mine, would they put you on any job they wanted you, or did you have choice in what kind of job you would take?

MP: They asked me to go. They needed me at the Travona, the shaft.

US: When you say shaft, what does that mean? What were you doing in it?

MP: Repairing that shaft, or sinking it.

US: Working on the timbers and just making it deeper...

MP: You talk about cold. The mines are red hot. You go in there. You’re sopping wet as soon as you get in there. You’re boots are full of it. In some places—I’m not saying all—some of them are cold as hell, like the Orphan Girl. It was always cold mining on the top. Three hundred and five hundred—Jesus, we were freezing all the time. The 700 would be bad too. You get down eight, ten...At 17, they hit the hot water. My god, you should have seen that place—red hot water. Anyway, I got transferred to the Travano. They were enlarging that shaft and straightening it out. That shaft was sunk on an incline on the ore. They followed the ore down. That’s the worst kind of a shaft there is. The shaft should be out in the granite and cross cut into the ore. As soon as they start them, skips up through them things that were sunk on an incline...because they have to fill behind it, and that filling is never as good as solid rock.

I worked down there. There’s water down there around the bottom in that. You get sopping wet. That air was coming down through that shaft. They would downcast. They’ve got a fan pulling air. If it’s 50 out on top, you can bet it’s 70 in the shaft. It’s terrible. You can’t believe it. It was slicker than freezing break. Ice on you and everything. Most of them Finns I worked with there are dead. I stayed there until 1948.

MM: You were working there during the 1946 strike?

MP: Yes.
MM: We heard a lot about that one.

MP: We never did get the right dump on that one.

US: No, we’re trying to find out.

MP: I’ll give it to you. All during the war, we done without vacations and everything. They were supposed to...

US: United Front.

MP: After...they paid us our vacations. In ’46, we had worked all year at six days. They paid us off at five days because they went five days, and they stopped paying us off at five days. We voted to strike. We had to leave maintenance men. This is something I never agreed with: maintenance men. I never worked maintenance a day in my life. They pulled some other caper there and got the men pretty mad. This one guy got up on the floor. He was hollering. He said, “I make a motion we go out on strike in the morning. Leave no maintenance men.”

That’s what we done. Jesus, talk about war.

This is what started all the wrecking and everything. They blamed the miners for that. The women came from church. These women were coming from church. One of their husbands was inside of the fence. The other woman didn’t talk to anyone. She stood on her front porch, and she said, “You bunch of dumb sons of bitches. I’ll be driving a Buick when my husband comes out from behind the fence. Your bellies will be scraping your backbone.” They wrecked her goddamn house. That’s what started it.

There’s two shift bosses that were in on that, organizing that wrecking. They were at the head of it; and lot of women; and some miners. I won’t say all the miners, but there were some miners. It was never through the union. We stopped...

US: Were they drunk? This crowd, had they been drinking?

MP: No. Maybe in some cases, but, Jesus, they fired pianos out the window and everything. But most of that was done by the company.

US: Where was that house?

MP: That house? Down on Upper Galena or Lower Galena...

US: Upper Galena.
MP: One of them...East Galena. That was the first one that was wrecked.

US: She was taunting everybody...

MP: She was taunting the women, so they wrecked her house. It spread around. It started going, and they started wrecking all of them. I went down in one case, this guy I had worked for and worked partners with for years. I knew he had a little boy that was not right. I got a call, and they said, “The (unintelligible) are wrecking Anska’s(?) house.”

I said, “So what?”

“Well, there’s a boy and wife right now.”

I said, “Oh Jesus.”

I went down. Some of these women that were outside: “What the hell are you doing down here? You should be up dragging them scabs out. We’re doing our job.”

I said, “You’re doing one hell of a job. You’re giving the miners a very nice black eye.” I said, “I’m taking the woman and kid out of here.”

Me and this other guy went down. Took them out. We took them up to some relation. We let them wreck the goddamn house. That kid was screaming. You could hear him four blocks. He didn’t know what the hell was going one. The kid was about five or six then.

US: They lived in our neighborhood.

MP: Finally, we had to take action to stop them.

US: How’d you stop them?

MP: Some of the guys went around wherever they were wrecking to tell them to knock it off. They weren’t doing us any good. They tried to deputize. They deputized someone—a miner. I wouldn’t be deputized. I told them to go to hell.

US: How about the one kid that got shot? How’d that happen?

MP: It had nothing to do with it. He was with her son.

US: No, he wasn’t. He’s a friend of my son. Billy was up in Brownstone.

MP: Was he? I know he was a good friend of him. That had nothing at all to do with the strike.

Maurice Powers Interview, OH 098-038, 039, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
US: He was just walking down the street?

US: He was coming home from a show.

US: Who shot him?

MP: Some guy who got a little crazy with a .22, but he had nothing to do with the strike.

US: The kids were going by, and they always sang and raised hell.

MP: They were singing and raising hell. He was mad, just some crazy bastard. He went out and shot him, the kid. It had nothing to do with the strike. I know that.

US: In the papers, it reads like...

MP: I know!

MM: The [Anaconda] Company put up those families at the Finlen Hotel? Was that right?

MP: They may have. I guess they did put some of them up. I didn’t care what the hell they did.

US: What did they tear up in the house? Everything?

MP: Furniture went out the window. Everything.

US: Photographs and family stuff?

MP: I suppose. I never checked them out, but I know they wrecked everything they came across. It was mostly women.

US: Yes, the women...

MM: But those two shift bosses...You think they did it at the instigation of the company?

MP: You bet. After they seen what the women were doing, the company told them to go ahead and do some more.

US: I think they paid off people to do those things.

MP: They paid off...but it was a hell of a mess. We got a hell of black eye out of it, which we didn’t deserve. What was the next thing that happened after ’46?
Every one of those strikes, I’d owe 400 or 500 dollars to the store. My credit was always good. I always paid up as soon as I went to work. But I never voted to go to back, and I voted for every strike. I guess there was a lot more like me.

MM: Did the union have any strike benefits in those days?

US: They’d do some food baskets occasionally and stuff like that?

MP: That never started until ‘54. Wait a minute... ‘46, just before that, the Masons were in there: Bill Mason and Joe Mason. Bill Mason was a board member. Joe Mason was president. They dropped the insurance. We’d carried insurance for our folks and everything. My wife had cancer. My wife went in, and they found out she had cancer. It cost me about 5,000 dollars. I had no coverage. That’s one of the things I held against the Masons at that time. Later on...

US: Why did they drop it?

MP: They just cut it off: no more insurance. I guess the insurance company wanted more. They never put it to a vote or anything. They just dropped the goddamn thing. We had no coverage. I went and made rounds around the hill again. I went to the Tramway and some of the other mines. Me and Smitty were working partners in them days. If we didn’t top the board, we’d quit.

MM: Top the board?

MP: Get the highest wages. We were working like hell.

MM: Was that on contract, then?

MP: Yes.

US: What kind of wages were you making then?

MP: Jesus, I can never remember. It might have been 6 dollars and something a day’s pay. I don’t know. It might have been a little higher.

US: It was three dollars and seventy-five cents in 1917, wasn’t it?

MP: Three dollars and fifty cents. Of course, the crafts got a little more. I might want to add onto that ‘46 strike.

US: Was it 1950 that mining bill got thrown out of the CIO [Congress of Industrial Organizations], right?
MP: I think it was before that. I’m not sure.

US: Why did they do that?

MP: Because we were too goddamn progressive. We were fighting for the men. They wanted to negotiate from the top down, and we wanted to negotiate from the rank and file up. The teamsters also got thrown out. They were too progressive. We were the ones organizing the CIO. The miners and the teamsters were the ones that really organized the CIO. We wouldn’t agree with their policy. We refused...we were the last union to sign the Taft-Hartley. When they put in that Taft-Hartley, every working man in the country should have sat down. I was preaching that up there, but I didn’t get far.

MM: Were you an officer in the union then?

MP: Not in them days. On all of the strikes, I was a boss picket and all that, but I was too busy working and with family. I was trying to fix the house at the same time. I was damn interested in the union ever since I was a baby.

US: Shop steward?

MP: Yes, grievance man and everything. Later on when the Masons got thrown out, we went to a convention. I’ve got pictures some of them conventions around here sometime. Anyway, Bill Mason disappeared, and here we’d find one of the big shots of the company, in Colorado, or any place where one of them conventions was. We knew he was selling us out. One time, they went into negotiations. The negotiating committee came back with a report that the company would withdraw their demands if we’d withdraw ours. We fired the negotiating committee, got a new one, and got dollar a day pay. They were selling us down the river.

We were getting pretty well fed up with the Masons. Then he tried to pull a sneak punch around Christmas time. When he knew all of the miners would be celebrating Christmas, some of them drunk, he tried to pull a sneak at a meeting and put us right into Steel [United Steel Workers].

MM: (unintelligible) told me about that.

MP: We rebelled.

US: (unintelligible)

MP: Bill Mason. He’s dead now. He got killed.

US: He had a wreck.
MP: He got killed in a car over here by Basin. We had a nice meeting down at the high school. We marched on the hall. Them sons of bitches jumped out the back window before we got there. We stayed around there holding the hall because they had a bunch trying to take over again. There’s a bunch who slept there and everything, in case they tried to break in. Jim Curtin was around during those times. I ran for trustee. I was elected. Leo Rooney was elected. Leo Rooney had a big mouth, and, boy, he could talk pretty good. Hard boiled.

US: He’s around yet, so you better be careful.

MP: I don’t give a damn. Anyway, he was elected president.

MM: What year was this?

MP: This would be ’52...anyway, Leo was elected president. I thought maybe Leo will do all right. No...there was another strike in ’54. Leo was picketing with me. We organized some pickets, Leo and I. I went to the Kelly mine. That’s where I worked. I was outside the gate at the Kelly. Leo and them went over the Anselmo. George Harper was with them. Red O’Brien was with them. The cops showed up there. They said, “Sonny, what’s the matter with the Anselmo? Ain’t there no pickets there?”

“Yeah,” I said, “we sent four over there.” It was kind of cold. “There should be four there.”

I see Leo and them. We used to drink together and raise hell. I said, “What the hell happened at the Anselmo? Where the hell were you guys when the cops were around there?” They were in the office with Bonner. Bonner told them to talk to Sonny Powers too, trying to get them to pull away from the union.

“If we sign up,” he said, “they’ll give us a dollar a day more.” Or some damn thing.

I said, “Are you guys falling for that bullshit?” Then they put out a leaflet: to the real Butte miner. The miners didn’t want to go on strike, although they had voted to go on strike. This leaflet said that the real Butte miner didn’t want to go on strike.

Then we’re picking up food from all over. There was food coming in from all unions. We’d give the guys baskets up at the union hall, according to their families. We had a food committee up there, helping them out. We had a restaurant up there. We opened up a restaurant.

US: That was your restaurant? The Miners’ Union owned it?

MP: We didn’t own it. They let us have it. It was empty, and they let us use it. That guy...

US: I see. That was the deal.
MP: We never owned it. We had cooks, waiters, and everything in there. Hell, we had great feeding. I was out rustling grub. I went down to the Deer Lodge Miners’ [Union]. At that time, I was also on the International [Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers] staff. I went down to the Deer Lodge Miners’ to get something from there. At first, all they wanted to know is when is the strike going to end, the Deer Lodge miners. Never mind when the goddamn strike is going to end; get us some grub in there, so we can fight and make some goddamn conditions for you guys, too. I said, “Whatever we get up there, you’re going to get.” They finally came up with a lot of stuff, the Deer Lodge miners, but it wasn’t until a day or two later.

In the meantime, I went into a bar down there. I never knew that they had put out these leaflets. Leo Rooney, Red O’Brien. I think his Nibs was in on it too. I don’t know. Anyway, this guy acted funny, and I was told that he was a union man. Big guy for the bar. I asked him if he’d contribute to us. I waited around all day, and I spent more money in there than he’d give us. We’d buy drinks while we were hanging around. They told us he would be a certain time. He didn’t show up, so we just stayed there until he did come. I pleaded our case before him when he sat down. He said, “I think you guys should try and find out who the real Butte miner is.”

“What do you mean?”

“I heard the miners don’t want to go on strike. They must have pulled it too much.”

I was thinking, what the hell’s a matter with him. I pulled my card out of my pocket. “Take a look at that card,” I said, “number 89.” She stamped right up. I said, “Would you say I was a real Butte miner?”

“By god, yes,” she said.

“Well, I want to be on strike. We’ve got a strike. Let’s get some conditions up there. I’ll give you five dollars.” I said, “You keep that five dollars until you figure out in your mind what’s worth some money, instead of something that...” I said, “Somebody will be back to talk to you. I don’t care to talk to you.”

On the way out, I see. One of the guys with me says, “Sonny, here it is. Here’s why we’re getting the cold shoulder.” They had one of them leaflets up there—“To the real Butte miner.” Or “To the people” or something...“The real Butte miner doesn’t want to go on strike. It’s a bunch of bull.”

I headed up to the union hall, madder than hell. I’d seen Red O’Brien spend a lot of money. I nailed him at the union hall. In the meantime, I’d found out that some kids up on the north side had been peddling these things. They paid them to put out these leaflets around all of the bars and everything around town. Rooney and Red had gone down to Deer Lodge and them places, and put them in them bars, trying to starve us out. They were supposed to be our buddies.
I nailed Red. I hauled him up to the house with one of these kids. In the meantime, they got on the phone. They called these people’s house and told them it had to be put under peace form. His old man told me, “Belt him if he don’t tell the truth.” I didn’t belt him. I didn’t get all of the truth out of him, but, Red O’Brien, I got the dope on him. Later on, I made a good looking guy out of him. He had a hooknose like that, and I smashed it to hell. When they fixed it, it was a beautiful nose.

US: Why had he done it? What were they trying to do?

MP: Paid off! They had 2,200 dollars—him and this other guy. I don’t know how much Rooney and them got. He came down, kneeled at my bed, and cried. A few more years later, he told me the whole, but he wouldn’t tell me if his nibs (?) was in on it or (unintelligible). Anyway, that was a rotten deal. That’s been the big problem in Butte right along: so many men can be bought. Sometimes, they can be bought damn cheap—a little pat on the back or something—maybe a promise of a better job.

US: You can’t tell who it’s going to be?

MP: It’s pretty hard. This guy, to hear him, he was the greatest guy who was ever in the union hall. Then it went up on negotiations. The president didn’t show up at negotiations. In the meantime, the same clause that they pulled in ’46... we lost the arbitration clause, but in that...the way they wrote it: the men shall be paid what they’re working at the time. In the meantime, the men went back on six day, and they’re paying them off in five day sections (?). I was working out at the Anselmo. I see some of these guys who had their vacation. I said, “What did you get paid?”

They said, “For five days.”

I said, “You’re working six, ain’t you?”

I took down their names. I took 12 or 14 names up to the union. I said, “Look, you can win this hands down. In ’46, we lost the arbitration case. This is in our favor now.”

I kept checking on it. I asked them if they got anymore. No, they didn’t get anymore. I went back up there. I said, “What’d you do about that?” (unintelligible)

[End of Tape 1, Side B]
MP: (unintelligible) was a labor commissioner for the company.

MM: Oh.

MP: He said, “We’ve always lived up to any agreement on arbitration or anything.” I said, “No, you haven’t.” He said, “What do you mean we haven’t?” I said, “Our president took twelve or fourteen names over to you. Those men got paid off at five days, and they were working six.” He said, “He never brought no such thing to me. You give me those names, and I’ll see they’re paid to six.” I went back over to the union hall; got the names. He wouldn’t come into the union hall. He was just hiding some place. He was drunk most of the time. Anyway, we got the six days for them during negotiations. Them negotiations, they were tough.

Finally, this guy kept drinking. Meeting night, you ought to hear him. I nailed him a couple of times. He was drunk, and he didn’t show up for this and that. I got all of the officers together. I said, “Look, what are we going to do about this guy. He’s disgracing this union.” He was drunk all the time, punching all the men and everything. He was supposed to be a great boxer in the navy, a champion in the navy. I don’t know how he ever got that title. Anyway, they refused to go along with me to oust him.

MM: What about the rank and file? Was there a lot of participation in union meetings?

MP: Yes, I’ll explain that soon. I tried to do something to him. We gave him another chance. We called him, and I said, “Listen, you want to act like a man, or you’re not going to be here.” I said, “That’s it.” He started again.

I got the officers together, and they refused to go along with me. I said, “Okay.” I took it to the floor, and I fired him. I fired the...(laughs) Jesus, it got bad.

US: Who was elected then in his place?

MP: A Finlander, a hell of a guy—Ernie Shulman(?).

US: A good guy?

MP: Good guy. We won a lot. There were a lot more we should have won. A lot of people think we’re always out for money, and this was bull. We were out after conditions, trying to make them clean up those damn mines, and they could have done it. We tried to even get them to go for this aluminum dust. In Canada, they done away with silicosis just about. They breathe in this aluminum dust before they went to work. Silicosis...they would tell us right out, No.
So I went to the legislature in ’59. I had a bill in there. Before that, the state was paying all of the silicosis money. I introduced a straight silicosis bill to make the company pay for it. Put them on workmen’s comp. Boy, I had them shook. I was on the committee. When you’re sitting on the committee...you’ve been around the legislature haven’t you? You have the one side gives the for, one goes against it; then they have rebuttal, and all this and that.

Brown made a statement—the company attorney—“You get the silicosis off the streets of Butte; you don’t got to get it only out of the mines.” They’d got a doctor from Galen that had been down there for years. He couldn’t understand how any two men who worked partners 35 years in the mines that one could have silicosis and one not. They made their statements. Callafazitch (?) was supposed to be for us. He answered that with, “Some men are made out of steel,” which was the poorest statement he could ever have made.

I was sitting there on the damn committee. The chairman of the committee said, “Does anybody on the committee like to ask some questions or make a statement?”

I said, “Yes. I’d like to ask a few questions and make a statement. Doctor,” I said, “who ever told you that any two men had worked 35 years as partners in the mine?” I said, “Him or him?” I pointed at two company men. He wouldn’t answer.

I said, “For your information, I don’t believe there was ever two men that worked 35 years as partners. I’ve worked in the mine a long time, and I’ve seen where two men worked maybe ten years. By then, they weren’t speaking. In a close place like that all the time, and things going wrong—they just didn’t do it. It was very rare that you’d see two men...” I said, “My statement is this: if any two men ever worked even ten years in the same place and were exposed to the same amount of dust, they both had silicosis. That’s my statement.” I turned to Brown and I made a statement. I said, “Get silicosis off the streets of Butte.”

I said, “All right, Doctor, I want the truth here. How many women did you treat in Galen for silicosis?”

“None.”

“Machinists then?”

“None.”

I named off a bunch more. “Waitresses?”

“None.”
I said, “It was miners, wasn’t it doctor?” I clobbered him. I clobbered their attorneys and every goddamn thing. I got it through with a due pass on the committee. Got it in on the floor...no, I got her through 100 percent.

One guy said, “This would be class legislation.”

I got up again and I said, “Which is class legislation? Do the taxpayers of Montana pay the ACM’s [Anaconda Copper Mining] bit? Because we’ve traced every silicotic in the state of Montana. Come out of the mines of Butte, except one, and he come out of the ACM company mine up in the Kalispell.” This is facts. I got it through 100 percent.

The goddamn senate, they held that hearing when I couldn’t be there. I had to be on something else. They killed it for class legislation. In the meantime, two phonies had introduced an occupational disease bill—a bill that wouldn’t (unintelligible). We took that bill. We put teeth in it. Made a damn good bill out of it. It’s become a law, so I didn’t fight no more for that one. I introduced another one that really shook them up to make the company pay back to the welfare of Montana, the welfare office, for all of the silicotics. That one had them going. I had the legislature behind me, but the senate was bad.

Anyway, we dropped that one for the occupational disease bill. The company attorneys were coming to me: “Please Sonny, amend it. Make it so it ain’t so strong. We’ll clean up the mines.”

I said, “You sons of bitches had 50 years to clean them goddamn mines, and you never made an attempt. The only way you’re going to ever clean them is with a good stiff occupational disease bill.”

I also tried to put on that bill industrial emphysema. Jim Humber(?) wouldn’t go along with it. Some of the labor finks wouldn’t admit it the next time.

US: Why?

MP: Don’t ask me. Somebody got to them, I think. Jim Humber and some more of them labor finks wouldn’t go along and wouldn’t to amend it. I said, “This is the time to get it!” They wouldn’t go along with it. Anyway, we passed it as it was. We had the right, in the union hall, with these forms, to file for these men. I put about 62 on that. There’s never been put out since I left there. I sent guys up there. Beavis was in the union at that time. He’d tell them, “I don’t what the hell Sonny’s talking about. He’s nuts.”

The occupational disease bill that I fought so goddamn hard to get through—them finks that went along with me—we had the PUD bill going good. It passed the senate too.

US: Yes.
MP: It’s coming in the legislature. It comes into the legislature and, here, these guys that have promised to go along, three of them went missing; killed the bill. Still, we’ve got labor bills coming. These Farmers’ Union guys, I’m madder than hell that they’re going to kill every labor bill. I had a meeting with them. I said, “Look, I hear you guys are going to kill every labor bill.”

He asked the goddamn labor piece if he voted against us.

“What labor piece? Did I vote against you? No. Did Henry Merton vote against you? No. That’s the only two labor guys.” I was lying a little bit. Healy used to work for the city. He should have been a labor guy. Picard was bar owner (?) and running an undertaking parlor.

US: They voted against it.

MP: They were the ones to vote against it. They killed it. You can see...

US: What about Shea?

MP: Company fink, 100 percent.

US: What about Wearden?

MP: Frank? Frank was very good until the one session he introduced that goddamn—

US: Eminent domain.

MP: —eminent domain bill. Frank Wearden introduced that.

US: He was going after the company on the eminent domain?

MP: Going after the people on the eminent domain. Giving the company the right to tear their property.

US: That was his?

MP: That was his bill.

US: Which Wearden is this? Anything to do with the plumbing?

MP: Frank Wearden, yes.

US: Frank Wearden, the plumber, yes.

MP: The great senator. They say what a great guy he was, but he sure cut the people so...
US: He gave them eminent domain.

MP: Right, so you don’t know. This is the guy that (unintelligible) swore by. I wasn’t in that session when he done that. That was in ’61.

US: The guy that runs Wearden’s now is Floyd...

US: That’s his son-in-law.

US: Son-in-law, okay. I didn’t know that.

MM: You were just in for that one session?

MP: They made damn sure Sonny Powers didn’t make it again. They had the electricians knocking on doors: “Don’t vote for Sonny Powers, or we lose our jobs.” Like I say, this old bitch down in...Edna Petersen. Was it Edna?

US: I don’t know.

MP: She sent letters to all of the service men through the American Legion and through all of them that I was a Communist and all kinds of stuff.

MM: Jim Curtin said that once...In the ’50s, with McCarthy, once they started labeling people communists, the company really picked that up and used that against...

MP: Jesus...they had Bill Mason in their pocket because Bill Mason was a damn good union man, first. They told him, “You better go hire out or you’re going back to Yugoslavia.” He was a Communist.

US: That was it. So he tried to hide his Communism and go along with the company.

MP: He turned in a bunch of guys. He signed their cards. He was putting out the Communist cards. He turned them all in.

US: Bill did.

MP: Bill was a stool pigeon for the company.

US: How about Joe?

MP: Stool pigeon.
US: When did they have their big turn around? Because they weren’t always that way, were they?

MP: No, they were good union men.

US: They got scared over being...

MP: The company had the dope on them.

US: When did that change take place, would you guess?

MP: Let’s see. It must have been ’53 when we chased them out of the hall, when they jumped out of the back windows.

US: How about some of the other guys? Like Reed Robinson, how was he?

MP: He was pretty good, but you couldn’t trust him with no money.

US: Why?

MP: He’d steal it!

US: One of those.

MP: I always kind of liked Reed, but he wasn’t to be trusted. I think he’d sell out in a minute.

US: He was a Communist.

MP: I think so. I’m not sure. I wouldn’t say anybody’s a Communist. A lot of them say I’m a Communist. I was never a Communist, but I’ve got some Communistic ideas.

MM: I saw your Debs book in the...

US: (unintelligible)

MM: I saw your Eugene Debs book in the bookcase.

MP: You ain’t seen half my books there: *The Cripple Creek Strike* and all of them.

US: Yes, that book is beautiful.

MP: This is another thing that was done during around that time—1914. That Cripple Creek strike...Big Bill Haywood and them were at the top of our union. They were assessing the guys in...
Butte, pretty heavy. It was pretty tough. The company finks within the union stopped the assessments and everything. That’s easy when a guy is putting money out of his pocket for some guys. He hates to part with his money. You tell him to go to hell; don’t support them bastards. We should have supported that Cripple Creek strike all the way through! This is before my time, but I read up on this. We should have stuck with Big Bill Haywood and them guys all the way. *The Man Who Never Died* is there too. You know who that is?

US: [Joe] Hill.

MP: That book is there.

US: It sort of sounded like, from everything I’ve read, that the leadership of the Western Federation [of Miners] got quite conservative. There possibly was some people that were pulling money off the top. I know that the people in Butte had been sending off all of these assessments to Michigan, and Michigan miners never were getting the money. That’s one of the big reasons in 1914 that they were so upset. They went to find out what was in the safe. There wasn’t nothing in the safe either.

MP: Here?

US: Yes.

MP: There was nothing in the safe? Not after the bastards cleaned it out.

US: They brought the safe out to the (unintelligible)—

MP: And blew it up.

US: —blew it up and there was nothing in it.

MP: Who said there was nothing in it? (laughs)

You know what happened? The mice got it. This is an old story in Butte.

US: The mice got it.

MP: When they asked where the money was, this old harp said, “The mice got it.” He couldn’t walk into a bar or anything.

Somebody would holler, “Hey, you got any of that mouse money? The mice give you any money?” That money was stolen here in Butte before it ever went to the Western Federation, and that wasn’t the leaders. That was the locals.
US: The locals.

MP: The locals were stealing it.

US: Voigt (?) took a big rap on that one it seemed like. They really tried to pin it all on him.

MM: Was your father a Wobbly?

MP: Yes. Her father was a Wobbly.

US: We’re going to pick on you after a while here.

US: I don’t have anything...

US: (unintelligible) Maury...

MP: We were talking about Blackie Murphy. Ernie Salvas was in those negotiations. We were getting grubbed from people and everything. I was going to punch Ernie Salvas in the mouth. We had a mass meeting down at the Civic Center. Salvas couldn’t be there; he had the mumps. There was another guy there. What the hell was his name? He was on the International staff at that time. That’s before I got on the staff.

US: It wasn’t Travis?

MP: No, Travis...Jesus, they murdered him. Travis was a good man. I forget this big fat character’s name. Anyway, he was doing the speaker, and he said, “We’ve gone as far as we could get. That’s as much as we could get, and the committee voted acceptance.” (unintelligible). Nothing—a two cent settlement or something. It was terrible. I’m coming out of the Union Hall, and here’s Ernie coming in.

I said, “What I ought to do is smoke you down. I ought to punch you right in the goddamn mouth.”

Ernie just raised his hands. “Sonny,” he said, “I know you’re a union man, but someday you’ll find out the truth.” He just walked by me. What the hell is going on here?

Then I find out, Blaine Beeky(?) and some of them characters...Blaine is dead, too. They were never nothing but finks. They were on the negotiating committee. They had talked to merchants and they weren’t going to give us any more grub and all this and that and (unintelligible). This guy made the recommendation on the floor. Then he turned around to the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] and said that the International Union was the ones that called the turn and Ernie Salvas recommended settlement. Ernie was in bed with mumps, the poor son of a bitch. He was the one got up in the Civic Center to recommend it.

Maurice Powers Interview, OH 098-038, 039, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
When they asked me to go down to Denver, I had an infected tooth and this gland was swelled out. I was sick. I had to take the plane down there. I got on the stand. I was half out of my head, but I knew enough to say that—to tell the facts. I said, “Either he’s a liar or I’m a liar, and I’m lying under oath because he was the one who recommended that settlement, not Ernie Salvas. He was home in bed with the mumps.” I said, “It was him and the committee.”

The committee fell apart on it. Jim Curtin was on that committee. Jim and them agreed first off, and then they backed off. When they seen how hostile the men were, they backed off, some of them, and they (unintelligible).

They had a bunch of these liars, lying about (unintelligible). Then he had to sign a Communist card and got turned in. Masons were the ones that were signing them in the window at the Miners’ Union.

US: When were they signing them up? When were the Masons signing them up?

MP: Early.

US: ’40s?

MP: In the ’40s.

US: There was also...there were Communists around in the ’30s, too, with the unemployed councils.

MP: Oh yes.

US: Did some of those guys stick it out?

MP: They were in Butte too. The Masons were in with them in the ’30s.

US: Who else was big in those days? Can you remember anybody?

MP: Big in those days? You mean of the Communists?

US: Yes.

MP: I can’t think of anything.

US: I wonder if anyone’s still around anymore.

MP: The old guy that used to live by you. He’s dead.
US: What was his name?

MP: Patty.

US: Old Pat.

MP: Patty something. He was a Commie.

US: He’s been gone for quite a few years now.

MP: Yeah, most of them are dead.

US: I’m going to use the bathroom.

MP: I just fixed that bathroom.

MM: You were going to tell me about Blackie Murphy?

MP: About Blackie, I’ve got many (unintelligible). Blackie, I don’t know why somebody didn’t kill him when he was drunk. He was at the house. He was drunk. “(unintelligible),” he said to Mary, “What nationality are you?”

She said, “I’m Yugoslav...”

US: Austrian.

MP: She said, “I’m Austrian.”

He said, “They were never nothing but a bunch of scabs.” Her father was blackballed up until the time he died. She hit the ceiling. She went after poor Blackie. She was going to kill him, and I had to throw him out. I got down to the Union Hall the next day. I said, “Goddamn you, Blackie. When are you going to learn to keep your mouth shut?” I said, “Mary’s father was blackballed for being a union man, a long time ago.” 1923, wasn’t it?

US: 1917.

MP: 1917.

US: He died in ’23.

MP: He died in ’23, but he never did work in the mines anymore. He was an active miner. Poor Blackie, he didn’t know what to do. He was sober and he said, “Oh God, what do I do? I’m going to apologize.”
I said, “Stay away from her. That broad can kill you.”

What did he do? He went over and he bought a dress for my little granddaughter and a box of candy for Mary. He came over, and he said, “Please, Mary. I don’t what…” (laughs). That’s the way he was when he was drunk. I think the only one he never turned on was me. He always treated me all right when he was drunk.

US: You and he used to drink together, so you got along good.

MP: I didn’t drink so much with Blackie. He was a character. Him and I started that youth center in Butte.

MM: Really?

MP: We were trustees.

MM: The one on the corner of the Union Hall?

MP: Yeah, on the top floor. We had that whole top floor. I’m telling you, we had the best youth center you ever seen. Then the finks got into it. They were splitting the take 50-50. I was too busy. I was on the board, but I was out of town a lot. I was with the International staff. I was also chairman and trustee of my union. I was elected to it. When I was out town, they schemed up different things, and they would throw these dances. I wasn’t paying enough attention.

I didn’t think any bastard would steal the kids’ money, but they would. That money was supposed to go in for the kids. They would have to ask the miners to fix something up there. One night there, we had 1,300 kids. It was the night of the Butte Central game, and we never had a fight after we kicked them out. We made money and we remodeled the whole upstairs. We only had about six dances one year. Remember, they were trying to throw free dances and everything to get the crowd away from us.

They remodeled it, and they put offices and everything in. You know where Val is? Val Webster? I had that for the old timers’ room, old time miners. It had green wallpaper, flowered wallpaper, and it had a big beautiful card table and everything. I had a thing like that, only a lot bigger...no, not like that. Like my china closet out there. I had a great big china closet. It was given to me. I put it up up there, and it ruined it. All that was changed since I left. Of course, they lost the youth center right after I left. I think there’s some of them that it caught up with.

MM: When did you retire?

MP: ’70. I’d moved out here. I was driving back and forth, and I had fallen asleep at the wheel. I was pronounced dead with a heart attack in Butte at 61.
US: Oh god.

MP: Mary was sitting out in the hall. I guess she was in there when they were pounding on me. I had a heart attack up here at Ennis. She drove a truck, and she’d never driven gear shift before. Into Butte. Got me in. I got into the hospital. The last I remember was laying on that damn table. Wasn’t that a table in there? That was no bed.

US: Was this St. James?

MP: St. James Community.

US: You were on a bed.

MP: I thought I was on a table. Anyway, I was laying there. Sweat, big globules of ice cold sweat, broke out all over me. I remember that much. I felt like I had a thing under my neck. That’s the last I remember. Mary was in there, and the doctor was pounding on my side trying to make me start breathing. They had an electric cardiograph on me—no pulse. They put me in a room to wait for the undertaker.

I woke up, and there’s some girl sitting over there. “Don’t move Mr. Powers.” I scared the hell out of her. I felt cynical. I felt mad because I woke up. I could wiggle my ears, so I started moving my ears at her. She said, “Your ear’s moving!”

I said, “I didn’t know it.” The doctor’s got his coat on, and he’s going home (unintelligible).

She run out in the hall, and she says, “Doctor, he’s alive!”

He comes in there, “He can’t be alive. That man is dead!”

I said, “You act disappointed, doctor.” I said, “I’ll wet on your grave yet.” (laughs)

MM: Mr. [Robert] Melvin told me that there were a lot of superstitions that miners had about going in the mines, and that the day before his accident he dreamed that his mother was walking with him in the mine. And...

MP: He didn’t get blasted in the mine though.

MM: No, he dreamed that that was going to happen.

MP: They were walking by this pipeline that blew.
MM: Mr. [James] Curtin said that, a lot of times, his wife would have a premonition that something was going to happen and wouldn’t let him go to work the next. That day, there would be an accident.

MP: Did you ever hear about the sun that come out during the...right after the disaster?

US: Which one? The Spec [Speculator Mine Disaster]?

MP: Let’s see...(singing) “A miner was leaving his home for his work, when he heard his little girl scream. He went to the side of the little child’s bed. ‘Oh Daddy, I’ve had such a dream. I dreamed that the mines were all seeding with fire. The men all fought for their lives. Just then the scene and the mouth of the mine was covered with sweethearts and wine. Go down to the village and tell your dear friends that sure as a dark cloud don’t shine, there’s something that’s going to happen today. Oh Daddy, don’t go to the mine.” It came up, and they all burned up in there.

MM: Were there other superstitions that people had?

MP: A lot of them. My old man could throw his voice.

MM: What was that?

MP: One time, up in the Eagle Bar and Saloon...I never knew anything like this. The guys told me afterward. My old man was quite a singer and everything. He was quite a guy, but he was shy. They say he had a better voice than his uncle...My uncle was financial secretary of the Western Federation of Miners in Butte.

MM: Really?

MP: Dave Powers. I’ve got a card there he signed before I was born. They had a big old piano box out in the front of the place. It was full of coal. This Murphy was goddamn tight with the coal in the wintertime. It was damn cold in that bar. Mr. Harrington was telling me this. Jerry Harrington, he used to be with the...his son is way up in the post office in Washington, D.C. or something.

US: Jim Harrington?

MP: No, no. My old man was throwing voice. He was hollering, “Help, help! Let me out!” It was coming out of that box out there. He knocked the lock off of the box to let the guy out, and there’s nobody in there. Then they start putting coal in the fire. Different things he told me about my father that I never knew.
One time, there was a guy...this was during the ‘17 strike. I was just a kid. I never put it together, even the thought of it, until now. My old man was up with the kids in the neighborhood: Bud Green and a bunch of them. They were a lot older than I was. He was teaching them to box. They had the big gloves. Here comes this guy over. Sullivan was his last name. He was all dressed up.

Some of the kids say, “Jerry, how about putting them on with Mr. Powers?”

He said, “Maybe I’m too good for him,” or some crack.

The old man said, “Come on.” He said, “First, you better take off that goddamn holster you got inside of your coat. You goddamn gunman.”

They put on gloves; the old man really decked him.

US: (unintelligible)

MP: (unintelligible). That’s what he was doing. Then he tried it again.

US: Oh, carrying a gun during the strike.

MP: They didn’t know it. Jerry...this guy, name of Sullivan, he was county attorney in Los Angeles afterwards. The same guy. He lived on Minah Street.

US: Your dad didn’t keep any kind of a journal or diary or anything like that in those times?

MP: No, I wished he did.

US: Do you know of anyone that ever did?

MP: Jerry Harrington might have kept something, but he’s dead I think—old Jerry the blacksmith. He was a blacksmith with my father. He used to be telling me stories about my father. I think he’s dead. He lived on (unintelligible).

US: You know Les Cunningham? He was a blacksmith.

MP: He’s younger though.

US: Yes, he’s probably whatever age you are.

MP: I don’t know...

MM: You were still working during the ’67 strike. Was that a real long one, the ’67 strike?
MP: Yes. I was living down here at that time.

US: No...

MP: No I wasn’t. I was not; I was up there.

US: We were in the store.

MP: Yeah, that was a long strike.

MM: Did the company want that strike? Did they have a big stockpile then?

MP: Yes, the company...

US: (unintelligible, talking at same time)

MP: Listen, a lot of them strikes, the company...they wouldn’t listen even to your demands. There was some work they had to do in the smelter or some goddamn thing. They had this goddamn maintenance clause in our contract. I hated that maintenance clause. I didn’t believe in it.

US: Which meant that, even on strike, you had to leave a certain number of people.

MP: You had to leave a certain amount of people there. This kind of stuff is what wrecks the union. Union men should all go out together. Them goddamn engineers, they were always fighting for maintenance. There would be as much of them working during a strike as there ever was. They got to run the engine. When the miners were one strike, the engineers were the scabs. Maintenance...not for the scabs, but they were...

[End of Tape 2, Side A]
[Tape 2, Side B]

MP: ...fought for conditions in the mines or for their jobs even. They never put up no fight.

MM: Why did they pull out of Mine Mill [International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers]?

MP: Because they didn’t want to strike. What the hell did they do it for that time? I went around and talked to them. One guy, I twisted him. I took this guy around to all of the engine rooms. Did I tell you? He was a damn good guy. We talked to the guys, Don’t go this route.

They said all right.

They had a meeting. Jim Curtin was put over them. I got him on the International staff. Jim, at that time, lost his head altogether. He couldn’t talk or nothing; in fact, he made them all mad. He started telling them, “I’ll give you some leadership,” and all this (unintelligible) about cracking the whip.

Kippy Loney (?), he says, “Don’t listen to anything I told you fellows last night. Vote to go out!” To go into the [International Union of] Operating Engineers; they were in the Stationary Engineers. They voted to leave us. Jim didn’t help too much with that. I ain’t saying Jim isn’t a union men. He lost his head. At that time, he was pretty sick too.

US: What about Bob Melvin? How did he stand with all of that?

MP: I always liked Bob.

US: He never did participate much, did he?

MP: He never used to participate.

US: He’s a quiet man.

US: When it was still Mine Mill, was he ever a union officer, or did he come to meetings?

MP: He was with the Operating Engineers...the Stationary Engineers.

US: They met separately.

MP: Yes. You know where the clerks are in the Miners Union? That’s where they were. As soon as they pulled, we put the clerks in there.
MM: Somebody told me that they pulled out because they considered themself a craft, and that they didn’t belong in Mine Mill.

MP: Maybe that was part of it. I don’t know. They didn’t want to associate. That goddamn Loney that was the head of them—drunk all the damn time. (unintelligible) against Communists. He hated Morris Travis (?). I sat by Morris Travis in the convention. He was mad as hell at me. I said, “What the hell’s the matter with you?”

“You were sitting by that Communist!”

I said, “I’ll sit where I goddamn please. I think Morris Travis is a pretty good man.”

“Oh, he’s a Communist!”

One thing is that he was a strict Catholic, and I’m a Catholic. I’m not the best in the world, but I am Catholic. He baptized a nigger one night in the bar—poor colored guy. He had his rosary beads out and everything out. I said, “Put them in your pocket. What the hell’s the matter, making this show out of yourself?” In the bar, he’s baptizing a poor colored guy, poor drunken colored guy.

US: That’s another interesting subject. Were there very many black people in Butte when you were growing up?

MP: No, not many. They had quite a few in the early days. They had baseball teams and everything.

US: What happened to all those folks?

MP: I’m damned if I know. They all pulled out of here. I guess there’s a few around yet.

US: Were they treated poorly?

MP: No, we never bothered any Negroes. They had their own club: the Silver City Club. In fact, I knew a lot of them colored guys that I thought the world of.

US: They never bothered nobody.

MP: No, they never bothered nobody; we never bothered them.

US: How about the Chinese?

MP: Chinese? They were treated all right. Except, there were some characters who would always hit some helpless guy or something. Ordinarily, Chinese got along good.
US: I know there was a lot of hatred of the Chinese earlier, back in the [18]80s and [18]90s.

MP: Great Falls—none were allowed in Great Falls. They drowned them.

MM: Really?

MP: Yes. In Butte, nobody bothered the poor Chinamen. Except one night, they...I was (unintelligible) on the hill. I was up with a gang up above. I was about 18. There used to be a laundry there on Copper Street, West Copper. Just as you turn around the corner from Main, there was a laundry up there. There’s a vacant lot there now. (unintelligible) I got the iron out of it, big heavy Chinese iron. They were smoking opium. They weren’t bothering nobody, but they had this music on. (sings melody) They had bunks. It was only a small building. There must have been 15 or 16 of them in there. My brothers and the kids, they were pestering them, I guess. This one young Chinaman come out of there with a goddamn gun. Just as I come down Main Street, the kids are running into the post office. The post office used to be open all night then. The kids run for the post office, and here’s the young Chinaman—bang-bang-bang with a goddamn automatic at the kids.

I was a little older. My brothers were...the one next to me was about two years and eight months younger than I was. They all went that way. I said, “What the hell’s the matter?”

They said, The Chinaman’s crazy.

“What were you doing, though?”

“We were listening to that music.” (sings melody)

I said, “You were doing more than that, but I don’t like that guy shooting at you.”

They had steps that lead up off the sidewalk. The building was set like this, and then they had steps out of the sidewalk, just tacked onto the building. I said, “Take five.” I went over onto the steps, about eight steps to the sidewalk. If you notice, that lot is built up that high. I kept loosening, while their music is playing. Then I walked up the street with the steps. I said, “Now throw some rocks against the door.” They threw rocks against the door, and here come the Chinamen. They step out and lay flat out on the sidewalk. That’s the only thing...

We pretty near caused a Tong war once, when we first started working in the mines. Go down to Chinatown—all kinds of Chinamen. We had primers (unintelligible). Put them in their keyhole with a piece of paper on them. Spit it (laughs). Blow the goddamn door open. Here comes the Chinaman. I was running down the street as fast as I could, and the big Chinaman went by me like I was stopped. He had kind of a nightgown on. (laughs) Boy, you ought to see him run. It
might have been a Tong war. The police were down there. They were going to shoot anybody on sight that was doing this.

US: Is this Jerry Murphy [Jeremiah Joseph Murphy]?

MP: He was the chief then. There were two cops. One of them in the doorway; the other one was in the alley. I come along. I put the goddamn primer in, and I spit it. I started running up the street, and this cop run out at me. He said, “Stop!” He had a goddamn gun on me. The cop behind him pulled the trigger. The bullet went between his legs, and I guess it went between mine. I don’t know. Boy, he started yelling. I scooted down the alley. I got away. Damn near caused a Tong war. There was a big Tong war there one time. They had underground tunnels underneath all of them buildings down there.

MM: I heard that.

MP: This guy was taking care of that building on the corner of Murphy and Main. There’s a great big building there. This fellow used to take care of it. His kid used to run along with us. We went over there one day, me and Bill Canel (?) with this kid. He said, “I’m going to show you something.” He pulled this lever. A bunch of old rags and stuff...it all moved over. There was a hole down underneath. We went down there and there were bunks. Here they are and they’re all filthy.

US: For God’s sakes.

MP: That tunnel went all over under town. It might have been a mine at one time.

MM: Somebody told me about that just the other day, that there were tunnels connecting all of those buildings...

US: I wish there were some of them left.

MP: There probably is.

US: It’d be nice to go through there, wouldn’t it?

MP: You probably could find one around here.

US: You could probably find some souvenirs down there.

MP: They’d be around that neighborhood. Probably caved in in places. There were bunks in there and everything. I’ll show you a knife that came out of one of them Tong wars.

US: Pasco. What kind of a name is that?
US: Our last name was Medo. M-e-d-o. Medo. We were from Yugoslavia...Austria, originally. My
dad was born in Dubrovnik (?) and my mother was from Dalmatia (?)

MM: Did they marry in Yugoslavia?

US: No, they got married here.

MM: Did your mother come over by herself?

US: Yes. I don’t know much of the history.

MM: I think it’s amazing how many women came over by themselves, made it out to Butte, and
started working in the boarding houses.

US: She lived in New York for a few years with some relatives. I don’t know if my dad’s family...

US: I can’t figure out how to put it back in.

MP: You have to push this button there. That’s a real piece of steel.

US: That’s a nasty looking knife.


MM: Really?

US: Put it in your holster, Bubba.

MP: Butcher knives. Somebody could cut their finger on it.

MM: That must have been very hard after your father was blackballed.

US: Yes, he never worked after the 1917 strike.

MP: I can’t believe it...He left for Wyoming for a while.

US: Yes, he went to Ely [Nevada] and (unintelligible) looking for work. Rock Springs [Wyoming].
Never did get anything.

MP: They tried to make a “white hope” out of my father in the Johnson times. He left Butte—
blackballed in Butte. He went to work in some little town. I don’t know what it was. I was too
young to remember that. They came through with their carnival champions or some damn

Maurice Powers Interview, OH 098-038, 039, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library,
University of Montana-Missoula.
thing. My old man had a few drinks. These blacksmiths were with him. He said, “They give 25 dollars to any man who can go two rounds or something with this guy.”

They pushed the old man up in the ring, and the old man flattened him. He flattened a few more of them, I guess. People in that town wanted to make a “white hope” out of him to fight [Jack] Johnson. He had six kids at home. No wait, he didn’t have...(unintelligible) wasn’t born yet.

US: Did you work?

US: Yes, I worked as a waitress.

MP: Here I have a picture at the Orphan Girl.

US: Where all did you work?

US: At the Dog House. That’s where the Alpine is now, on Park Street. I worked there for a long time. I worked at Trezzolina’s(?). I worked down at Lydia’s. I worked at the Red Booth. I cooked there for a year.

US: My god, you worked everywhere.

US: Did you work in Meaderville at all?

US: Yes, I worked at the Rocky Mountain [Café], but I didn’t like it there, so I moved on.

(MP and MM conversing in background; unintelligible)

US: You didn’t like working for the...?

US: I didn’t like the gals.

US: The Grossos (?)

US: No, the Rocky Mountain was Teddy Traparish.

US: I’m all mixed up. What did the Grossos own?

US: The Arrow (?)

US: The Rocky Mountain...

US: No.
US: The Arrow. Were there any connections?

US: No. Lydia worked in the Arrow. For years, she worked at the Arrow.

(Several people talking at same time; unintelligible)

MP: That’s my family, after my father. This is (unintelligible). Did you see where I was a priest?

MM: Oh no...that’s not you, is it? (laughs) It doesn’t fit the character.

MP: If I was a priest, I would drive Butte crazy. I would be arguing about the Vietnam War. I used to raise hell with him.

US: Is that Finnegan?

MP: Don’t mention that character.

US: Okay. (laughs)

MP: This is my brother...

US: We don’t want that on tape, what you’d say about him.

MP: That’s the only medal he got.

US: (unintelligible; laughs).

US: Where was this?

MP: That’s right by my house there on Copper Street. That was up above Alaska Street, right below the red zone line.

MM: When you were on the staff of the International, did you just work in Butte, or did they send you all over?

MP: I was in Butte.

There’s his report card when he was a big star. Look at the kind of marks he got. He’s not dumb that way.

US: No. (unintelligible) Creighton University.
MP: He was fighting cases when he was dying, when he was living on whisky. He had cancer of the lungs, and he couldn’t eat or nothing else to do. Laying in bed, he had a thing there to call his office.

US: Who was this?

MP: My brother. John...youngest brother. Here the two of them are: Eddy and...they’re both dead. We called him (unintelligible)...

US: Who’s this?

MP: That was my wife’s mother—my first wife’s mother.

US: And that?

MP: That’s my daughter, sitting outside the...this is the church where they said the first Miners’ Union meeting was held—the Goldfield Lutheran Church. It was held upstairs.

US: Is that still standing?

MP: No, it was torn down. That was right next door to my house. I still own that little house. That’s another one I’ll send one.

US: I’ll have to get all of these addresses when I go, so I can go back and look at them.

MP: You can go in there and it wouldn’t bother me. I wouldn’t be against it.

(Break in tape)

MP: This is a spurious world. You do your work for an Englishman. You room with a French-Canadian. You eat in a Finish restaurant, where a Chinaman cooks your chuck. You buy your clothes from a German-Jew, your shoes from a Swedish-Pole, and you place your hope in a Diego pope to save your Irish soul. (laughs)

[End of Interview]