Richard Grace: I thought it would be easier if I wrote this out.

Helen Bresler: Yes, I have your name down here.

Richard Grace: Stories about Butte. I have memories of happy days, sad days, good and bad days, and memories of people you will always remember and never forget. Butte is a mixture of all races, colors, and creeds. The result has been a group of people who care for their fellow man and who always hold out a helping hand.

I think one of the fondest memories has to do with the sports in Butte of my boyhood days. We had professional baseball teams, football, soccer, hockey, boxing, and many others. Baseball was played on the Clark Park and Columbia Gardens ballparks. We had teams like the Montana Fire, the Colorado Pits, the Black Speck Pianos (?), and players who went on to the minor and major leagues like [Frankie] Crosetti, who played short stop for the New York Yankees championship teams for many years. I wish I could remember all the others.

On Miners’ Union Day, when they played a couple of games at the Gardens, we would sit with the players, and sometimes they would give us some of their Greek (?) snuff chewing tobacco. When you are 11 and 12, it feels great to be able to go near such great players. We had a league that played on the regular Gardens’ days, which was Thursday each week. The streetcars would carry you free to the gardens. You would ride free up to one o’clock and back home free up to six o’clock.

During the week, we played at any open field we could find. These were just rough fields like the Sanders, the Big Butte Grounds, and many others. They were never graded and almost never level. We were lucky to have a couple of baseballs, a few bats, and sometimes only the catcher and the first baseman would have baseball mitts. Baseball equipment was overalls, tennis shoes, and just a regular shirt and cap of any kind, and any kind of a glove we could find. Sometimes, the baseballs had the covers knocked off and then we had to tape them with friction tape to hold them out as long as they could. Nothing like the equipment, dress, and things the young people have today. No coaches, no sponsors, and not much to work with.
Football was one of the real great enjoyments that the Butte people appreciated. Teams, like the professional teams today, were big, rough, and very physical: not too much passing or fancy stuff, but just pure strength. Many players from the best college teams in the country had a hard time making the first string on the Anas (?), the Bells, Sentinel, Hubs, and Englewood teams. The independent teams at that time had beat the university and college teams with ease. Players were all fellows who worked in the mines. They started at age 14, doing the heavy manual work or pushing cars, shoveling, and loading cages. By the time they were 18, they were lean, strong, and very tough. Six to seven thousand young fellows worked in the mines during the 1920s. Many were single and had very little responsibilities unless they came from a very large family. Each Sunday, the Clark Park would fill up to capacity. Each club had boosters, who were very supportive of their teams. It was nothing unusual for several fights to be in progress during the game. After the game, the Nine Mile was a very popular place for settling disputes on and off the field.

Hockey, also, was another very popular sport, with the local teams trying their best to upset the Clark team, which was made up of Canadian players, and playing for the manager of the Holland Rink. There were usually three or four local teams and the Clark team. Again, players were imported for their skill on the ice to make these games interesting. When I say “imported”, the mines at this time were all under different ownerships, like the Clark mines and the other mine owners. They usually bought the equipment and had doctors in attendance at the games. They had a place where the people worked out and practiced. The old Holland Rink also produced many champion skaters: they won races in Canada and in the eastern states of the United States. There were also a lot of local places that kids either flooded or the mines flooded; later, the city would flood those areas so neighborhood kids could have a place to skate. We played [hockey] on these neighborhood rinks using a broom and tin cans.

Soccer was played at the Gardens, and it wasn’t the most popular sport because there were only Irish and English who seemed to be very active in the sport at this time.

When you talk about basketball, you remember some of the best independent teams in the state and, possibly, the Northwest in the early days. The Montana Harvard team played together for a number of teams and had such fine working teams that they were champions for over 10 or 12 years. Both high schools were state champions and were keyed on by the other towns in the state. There were many places to play: they YMCA, the KC [Knights of Columbus], St. John’s Episcopal Church gym, Butte High, and a few neighborhood gyms. Many college players would return to Butte and play with the independent teams.

Boxing was truly a great sport, enjoyed by thousands. When the amateur championships were started, it would take a week to get down to the final bouts. We had many professional fighters in the old Broadway Theater. There were some excellent fighters out of Butte: Joe Simonich, Dixie LaHood, Sonny O’Day, Thor Olson, Bo Ramones (?), and many others, who sometimes fought once a month on the local ring cards (?).
These are some of the things we enjoyed in the late ’20s and the Depression of the early ’30s. In Butte, somehow, the Depression ended a lot of these sports. The ownership of the mines went to the giant Anaconda Company, and they became more interested in profit and cutting expenses to satisfy the eastern stockholder, so that much of their support was withdrawn from the sporting programs. They did some public relations, but, eventually, the Columbia Gardens was not kept up; the streetcar service was eliminated; finally, today, they have destroyed all of the early day treasures for a paltry sum of profit that has left open pit mining and dumps all over the area. Then, they sold out to the big oil interests who could care less for the people or the environment, as long as the all mighty dollar was returned to the millionaires, who had more greed for profit than they had for the betterment of the human race. Yet, when they leave, they end up all with just about the same amount of space as the poor miner that they deprived of his pleasures.

Butte has more home grown natives than many other cities in the United States. It seems, wherever you go, you meet someone that has had some fond memory of the people he knew here. Our young people, gradually, are all leaving because of a lack of opportunity for them and we are fast becoming a retirement community.

HB: Do you think a lot of people here feel pretty angry about Anaconda tearing down Columbia Gardens and...?

RG: Yes, they were very upset, very angry, over it.

HB: What did people do to try to prevent that? Anything?

RG: There isn’t much you can do. The amount of power the money swings, it’s like trying to fight the oil interest today in the United States Senate and Congress. They can buy so much of the power to change things that you can’t do anything about it. The ordinary fellow’s not organized enough. The company lawyers know just where to put the money.

For instance, in the legislature in the early days, the legislature in Helena was dominated by the mining interest in Butte. All of the laws and everything that were made were in their favor. Butte was the only town, I think, in the United States where you could buy...where the mining interest, a corporation, could buy your property with the right of eminent domain. In other words, you couldn’t fight them. The only way the United States can take your property from you is if you’re in the right of way of something for the betterment of the majority of people, like the right of way of a transmission line, oil line, or something like this that is going to benefit a great bunch of people. For a private corporation to be able to take your home from you, that’s one law they got put through. Nobody knows when they put it through.

One of my gripes here is we’ve got a creek running through the middle of the city to take the copper and water out of the mines. For fifty years, that’s been in the power of the company to have that, regardless of what the condition is, or the fog or anything else it creates. It’s never
been changed, and no one’s ever been able to beat that law. If you’re a good lawyer, you fight them for a while, but pretty soon you’re ending up on their payroll. That’s the way they do it.

HB: Do you remember when the smelters used to be here, or is that before your time?

RG: That was a bit ahead of my time.

HB: Probably they moved the smelters then because...

RG: After they killed all the vegetation...The smelter in the early day was not the Anaconda Company; there was private owners. Marcus Daly is the one that put the smelter in, I think, in Meaderville. Then, he wanted to create...he created the town of Anaconda. That was his town. Also, the hotel...did you ever see that hotel?

HB: Yes.

RG: It’s pretty well torn down now. He created that. The story we heard on that one time is that he had four stories of it built and he invited all of his prominent friends of his from the East out to see it. He was worth millions then, which today would be like half a billionaire. They said, “That’s going to be a real nice hotel when you get the rest of it finished.” Then he put another story on it. He built the town of Racetrack, near Deer Lodge, to race his horses. He built a retirement place down in Hamilton, Montana for his retirement. He has a big place down there, where he would take these horses and use them for breeding.

He had a picture in that hotel of his horse Tammany, who was a national champion horse at one time. I don’t know if he won anything in the Kentucky Derby. I don’t know if they had that in those days. He was a beautiful horse. The picture was in back of the bar and then he had a deal in the foyer of the horse. It was a beautiful bar in those days.

HB: Everybody’s told me a lot about Columbia Gardens and how nice it was.

RG: It was beautiful.

HB: You mentioned that they had Miners’ Union Day and things out there. What was that like?

RG: Miners’ Union Day in Butte was a day when all your men of the miners’ union and your other crafts, like your machinists and your electricians...all of these different crafts would march. They had to march or they were fined. You’d have maybe 8,000 or 9,000 miners walking over the street; maybe a couple thousand electricians and a couple thousand pipe fitters and all that; you’d have probably around 20,000 in the parade, going over the street. This would all end up out at the Gardens. Many of these families would have their picnic lunches out there.
Then they’d have a sports program. They’d have so many championship boxing matches. They’d have these baseball teams, the top teams, playing. They’d have different mine contests, like drilling, filling these one ton cars with rock. They’d have contests for the kids, like races. For the women, they’d have nail driving. They had prizes for all of this. They had...out there they had a flower deal on the side of the hill. All year long they would be planting these pansies and stuff. They had beautiful floral designs and everything.

On top of that, they would have...the YMCA would have a couple of men out there, training the boys in all this stuff you see them doing now on the bars. They’d have all the women doing all the...girls, grade-school girls. You were in that weren’t you; doing all those plays the grade-school kids would be in? They trained out at the Gardens. During Miners’ Union Day, they’d put on a performance of these.

HB: Dancing on the grass out there.

RG: Yes, on the grass. They’d have these girls all with formations of dances. It was a marvelous day for entertainment. The company would furnish the lemonade and all that. The people would bring their lunches. It was a terrific day. All of the street cars would take them out free and bring them back. Doubleday (?) Clark owned the streetcars. With different ownerships of the mines, like Marcus Daly and [F. Augustus] Heinze...they owned the mines. They would all go in together on the prizes.

First-aid, they’d have championship first-aid contests. Men hurt in the mines had to have...if you broke a leg something, you’d have to have something done right away. They’d have problems made up, and each mine would have its own team. They would compete to see who was the best. They would have men judging this as to how they wrapped them, or fixed a broken bone or cracked skull or something. Miners’ Union Day was a big day in Butte, a terrific big day.

HB: When did they stop doing this?

RG: World War...They still have Miners’ Union Day, but, when the Second World War started, copper was pegged at 12 cents a pound. The company saw no reason to defer a lot of these young fellows that were called up in the draft. If your father worked in the mine, there was a 90 percent chance that, when you finished the eighth grade, you would work in the mine. You could work in the mine in those days, when my brother went, for three and a half a day; where downtown, you worked for sixty dollars a month. You worked eight hours, five days a week, downtown. You worked the same thing in the mines, but you were paid a lot more money. So 90 percent of the families followed on through.

When World War Two came, if I was working in the mine, and I was called up for draft, I was not given a deferment. Copper was supposed to be a critical material for the war, but all these young fellows were drafted. They didn’t lift a finger to defer them because, at 12 cents a
pound, they were making nothing in copper. What they done then is they got it passed through...you talk about fighting big companies. They had the thing passed through where the government paid them cost plus to mine copper. Every waste dump and every old outfit all through the whole area was mined because they were making money on it. The more old people they hired and everything to do this, the more money they made, adding 10 percent on top of their expense.

But they took no good copper out. If you ran into a big vein...say there was a vein of copper as big as that wall there and the miners ran into it, the next day when they went to work that was sealed off and they were put to work in another part of the mine where there was low-grade ore. The high-grade was all kept until the war was ended. After the war ended, of course, all these restrictions were lifted and the price of copper went up. Then, they went in and mined it. (unintelligible). This is true of a lot of things, like ship building and everything. Everything was this way: cost plus. They just pillaged the hell out of it while they could.

We lost all our young. Once they got out of here and saw that there was opportunities all over the country different than this, they never came back.

HB: These were common miners that didn’t get deferments. Did they keep the engineers and the people who were more skilled?

RG: To a certain extent, they kept most of those. To a certain extent, they did. If you had like a geologist’s education. A great many of those people left here too because, with copper pegged where it was, the big money was on the coast. You could make more money on the coast in different places, like going out of here and going to all that stuff. It all led to where we lost an awful lot of people, and it never did recover back from World War Two.

HB: How about during the Depression: did very many people leave here then?

RG: Not so much because there was no place to go. Where would you go during the Depression? It was the Depression everyplace. The only thing that happened during the Depression was, and this was typical of all cities in the United States, a great many young people went riding the rods. You go down there, jump on a freight train, and go. At different spots where you get off, sometimes they had place where they would feed them and give them some clothing and stuff. Other places, the railroad police would chase after them and run them out of there. It was nothing but a drain on the economy, wherever you get a group of these vagabonds, or bums you might call them.

As a result, you stayed here and worked on government programs like the WPA [Works Progress Administration], which was 60 cents a day. You could only work three days a week, six hours a day. That’s what you had to live on. In a family of three, if my brother worked, I couldn’t work. If my brother was working...the miners were on one week one, two weeks off. A lot of the mines closed because there was no market for copper. You had programs like
government surplus. They had lard, and they had beans. They had stuff like this that they had piled up, and they would take and distribute that around. They’d give you big work shoes and maybe a pair of overalls. You ate hot cakes three times a day, and you liked it.

HB: Do you remember what kind of projects the WPA gave you?

RG: Yes, they rip rapped a score (?) of mines out there. We did that, and we tore big hills out of there, anything just to put the people...to keep them busy. We filled in the centers, and then they found out that was privately, so we had to dig it all out of there again. Stuff like this.

Also, they did some good projects too, like out on the flat, they had no sewage system. It was mostly all cesspool from Grand Avenue on, even from Front Street down in those days. Many of the people lived up north of Cedar. What we call the flat was very sparsely settled in those days. To put in this sewage system, they had to take and start digging these big ditches. Sometimes they were down 18 feet. It was all soft soil. They used the WPA to do all that and grade it, to put all those in in different areas out in the flat out there. They did a lot of good things like those.

HB: Do you think the Depression was any worse here than it was anywhere else?

RG: I would say it might have been the same all over. I don’t think it was worse in any one place.

HB: I want to back up a little bit and ask about your family. When you were growing up, did different ethnic groups live in different parts of town?

RG: Yes. When we were real young, the Irish stayed in their place; the Finns were down on East Broadway; the Italians were mostly in Meaderville; the English were mostly in Centerville; your Austrians were mostly in parts of the Eastside, in the Queen. It was very much ethnic groups. Also, religion had a great deal to do with it. If you were Catholic, you didn’t dare marry an Episcopalian, or somebody else. Or the Jewish, the Jewish people stayed in their little area.

My mother and their family, they would come and settle where some of their people were. There was five sisters and one brother in my mother’s family here. One would send home money to bring the other out. I don’t know about the other groups, but, in the Irish race, with the potato famine in the wing when it was oppressing Ireland in those days, the thing was to get out of there if you could because there was nothing there, and they were starving in most areas there. The English were doing nothing to help. When you read some of these books now that are written, you can tell where they were more oppressed than sometimes the Negro in Africa. The theory was to get to where these other people were and find work and things like that. Of course, they worked. My mother worked for 15 dollars a month as a cook. This was big money compared to what they got back there.

Richard Grace Interview, OH 098-025, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
If an Irish girl married an Austrian boy, or the reverse, or Finnish, it was a great disgrace to the family in those days. Or if you married out of your religion. It wasn’t any one over the other: each race felt the same way about their people.

HB: They just wanted to keep...

RG: Maybe about two generations later, this happened to come about where, yes, you could marry out of your race, but religion was still a crucial thing. Religion was still hard fought. I’d say maybe going on the third generation, like my mother’s day coming here, it began to be where it wasn’t such a bad thing. In the early days, too, if a girl went out and had a baby, and she wasn’t married, she might as well leave town. It was the biggest disgrace. Even the family felt it more than the girl. The biggest disgrace that could happen to a family would be for my daughter to go out and have a baby and no marriage. This was just out of the question altogether. There was no such thing as relief or anything. If you had the baby, and you didn’t adopt the baby, you raised it the best way you could, and suffered the disgrace. You were just like one of the women over town.

Another thing, in my mother’s day, a woman never went near a saloon. They weren’t bars in those days; they were called saloons. If you were seen in there, all of the men looked down on you. There’s only one type woman that went in a saloon. This is the way they were in those days.

Relief wanted (?). You found it in the north side there, and I guess in all places in town, but I’m mostly familiar with that. Many men, like my father, died in the early days and left families, some big families, some very large families. Most of those women had to go out and work as janitors, in the laundries, or different places to try to raise their family. The kids had to go out, like we did at an early age, selling papers, and things like this, to make ends meet all through the Depression and other times. These women all come together and the family come together.

Of course, the women had no social security or anything, so, when they got old, it was your job to take of them. Like these women now...there’s no such thing as government relief or anything. They had what they called a widow’s pension. That was, I think, 15 dollars a month. If you took that, you were no good. You were lazy. You weren’t worth talking to because you were laying around the house and let the county keep you. It was a county thing. Very few women ever applied for this. They mostly went out, worked, and did it the hard way. Now, of course, it’s (unintelligible) and get everything you can. There was no such thing as food stamps or anything.

In Christmas time...what was the name of that club that used to bring around the oranges and groceries? There was some fellows got together in the Elks’, and they were having a drink around Christmastime. They got talking about some family that had nothing. They said that they’d go down; they bought a turkey, they bought a lot of stuff, and they took it down and gave it to this family. They formed a group. Every Christmas, they would get donations out of
the stores of canned goods, potatoes, sweet potatoes, and turkeys. Christmas Eve, they would take them to all those families that were really down and pretty well depressed. I think they would deliver three or four hundred of those. A lot of the grocery stores would donate their...in those days, it was horse and wagon deliveries, a lot of it, and old cars—the first trucks that ever came out. They would donate that. These men would all donate their time. They’d spend all Christmas Eve, all that night, delivering this stuff to these different families.

HB: They kind of helped each other, or they tried.

RG: Yes, this is the way they helped each other. If you were burned out, there was very little life insurance, very little fire insurance, in those days. If we had a bad fire here, and it burned down, in no time, they’d have a place to stay with somebody, or a place we could stay. The stuff would come in. We’d have more inside of two days than we’d have in our own lifetime. Everybody would donate stuff and bring it in. It just seemed like they gravitated to each other. This was true of all races: both the Irish and English, and you Finnish. They all did the same kind of thing for their people. It was a great country. Of course, it’s great today, too, but it’s changed. The generations change as they go down through. It’s a little bit different in that way.

She’s got me talking more than I thought I would. (laughs)

HB: I love it. I want everyone to talk. What did your father think about working in the mines? Did he like it?

RG: I couldn’t tell you. I hardly remember my father.

HB: How about your brother?

RG: What did he think about working in the mines? In those days, it was good pay. It was good money, and all the young fellows worked in the mines, or nearly all of them. It was better pay than you’d get downtown. They worked, but they also had a way of taking five, too. They seemed to have a group, like their union groups and all that. Just like the coalminer now. It seems like one gravitates to the other, and they seem to have their own enjoyment. The sad part is that, if they worked long enough, they had a lung full of copper dust, and they were just out of luck. It was the part that got to them.

HB: Do you think that worried your mother about having to work in the mine?

RG: To some extent, yes. You always worried about injuries. There were great injuries in the mines in those days, and very little compensation if you got injured. Human life was cheap. Cheapest thing on the whole hill was human life. If you damaged a machine, that cost money, but if, like when my father died, a man got killed in the mine, they might give the family 500 dollars and a load of wood every three or four months. That’s about all you got out of it. There
was no such thing as compensation or the average value of your life over the years for your family, or things like this. It was just tough. You got killed: so what?

It was up to you to take care of yourself when you were down in the mines. In other words, you made sure who you worked with. If you were working...if you and I, us three, were working together, we had to make darn sure that we worked pretty much together. When you went on a mining shift, or the minute last before you went on shift, you looked for a loose rock and everything to get it out of the way because, if that came down and crushed you, that was your tough luck. You had to have a certain footage of rock out of there, too, through that day and a certain number of little one ton cars of ore out of there before you left that shift. You made darn sure you knew who you worked with, and that they were good workers and careful workers. Otherwise, you were out of luck.

They injured an awful lot of men in the mines in those days because mining conditions weren’t the best. All of these conditions were hard fought. They talk about miners’ strikes in Butte. The only thing most people heard about out of it Butte was that the miner was after more money. What was the miner was after was a lot of conditions, too.

In the early days, there was what they call a buzzing, a thing that would drill a hole in the walls. Then, they would put dynamite in. In the early days, when my father mined, that came out all dust, and they were breathing that dust. You had no way of getting away from it. One thing they fought down was to get water down in that mine, so that water could be put in that machine, pumped into the hall, and dampen the dust, so that they had a little better chance of not breathing it all in. That took a strike to get some of those conditions.

Another thing was a two man system. When they hired you, they might put you working in what they call the stoke (?). You had man-way like this, and then they’d find copper ore was above this a hundred feet. They would drill a hole up through that, and then you had to mine into that to get that ore out and dump it down, so that it could be taken out. But you worked alone. When you went down to work at 8 o’clock in the morning and you got hurt about nine o’clock...a slab of rock comes down and hits you on the leg and pins you down. You were bleeding bad.

When you were alone, you never were found until what they called a firebug went through at the end of the shift. That was one man who was designated to cover certain number of levels to check to be sure that men were not in there. He and the time people would get together. When he’d come up, he’d say to the time people, “Everybody’s out.” The time people would go through his book, and they’d see if he checked everybody off. If one man was missing, then you had to back and look for him. When he came to that place where that man was working, that man might have been dead—bled to death. Or, if there was another man near, he could have went up and helped him get out of it, or gotten more help in there to get the man out, and he could live.

Richard Grace Interview, OH 098-025, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
To get a two men system, a thing that was two men working near each other, they had to have a big strike. They fought that because that meant more money, more expense to the company. What the hell, that man...they could get another man in that stoke next day. (unintelligible) It didn’t matter to them. Most of your mines, in those days, were owned by eastern stockholders. All they could think about was what dividend was coming in for them, not what it costs. It’s just like the coal miner today. They don’t give a damn what he breathes or what he does. If he doesn’t want to work for that money...

[End of Side A]
RG: ...that grew up in the areas. They were sympathetic to a lot of the local problems. It was much easier to get things settled in agreement on the different conditions the miner needed. The minute the ownership went to eastern stockholders, and was put on the market, then, you lost all the local sentiment and all the local feeling. When you lose that, they don’t give a damn about anything but (inaudible). This thing progressed through the years, while we were...like all of these other big interests, they don’t give a darn.

HB: Is that why you didn’t work in the mines...?

RG: Why I didn’t work in the mines is...when I got my rustling card to work in the mine...by the way, too, you had to have a card before you could go ask for a job. You went to what they called the rustling card office. A man took your height and name and all down. You would take that to the different mines. You’d go to the man in the mine who was doing the hiring at that time, or who needed men. You would ask for motoring, mining, timber, or whatever you were fit to do. If he needed a man for that, and he thought you could do the work, he would hire you. You gave him your card and he told you when to come out to work that night, or the next day. They kept that card while you worked for them.

When you quit or got fired, you would have to go downtown to the card office, and get that card back, before you could ask for employment again. If you weren’t a good work, or if you were one of these rabble rousers, or a guy that gave them a lot of headaches, you never got your card back. So you never got another job in the mines. You were blackballed.

When I got out of high school, the first thing I did was I went up and got a card to go work in the mines. I went home. The next thing I did, I got my tail kicked off by my brother. He took my card, so I never got a job in the mines. I still have the card. My mother saved the card. It’s one of the oldest cards in Butte, I think. Probably is one of the oldest cards in the city. And one that was never used! (laughs)

HB: You think mainly the rustling cards were one way to keep people...?

RG: The rustling card came out of Leadville, Colorado. When the miners were working in Leadville, there was a lot of trouble in the mining back there at that time. A lot of the miners came here from down there. They wanted conditions, maybe better pay, and things like this. They would go on strike. When they did this, like they did here, they’d import men in to work in the mines. Of course, here the name for it was a scab. If you took another man’s job for less money and less conditions, you were scabbing on the other fellows.

In Colorado, when they did this, they imported these fellows in, and they ran into a great amount of trouble. The only way they could get rid of what they called the leaders of the union, or the men who were trying to get the change, was to put this card system in. The ones they
didn’t want never got a card, so they were out. They were what they called blackballed. The others would get a card to go to work. If you were a fellow that never created waves, you could work. That system spread through the mining in this area. I don’t know; it might have spread through other areas too. That came into this area in the early days. The card system was what they had to go by. They could never get that system.

Of course, as time went on, and the Anaconda Corporation bought up the other mines...they bought out [William] Clark and a few more. As it got to be the one big giant corporation, they could control this card system much better then. It was just one little deal then. In the early days, too, if you didn’t like ACM [Amalgamated Copper Mining], you could go to work for Clark. Or you might go to Heinze, or you might go to one of the others and apply for work. If you were a good worker, chances are, you could go to work for them. After they got control of all of them, nothing happened.

In the early days, too, Clark had the street car system. He had the Columbia Gardens. Anaconda would promote a lot of his sports programs. They had a big fight over litigation down in the mine, and out of that came the...I think out of that came the famous ruling that you could follow a vein of copper to what they call its apex. If it went in the other fellow’s property, it was still your vein of copper. There was a lot of pirating in those days. You’ve probably read some of the early day history of Butte. I think it was Heinze. He found out where the other guy’s copper ore was, so he hired men to drill through and go to the other end of it. He stole a lot (unintelligible).

This was happening between Clark and Anaconda. They had a court litigation deal on it. Some of the things you see up in the mining museum, these portraits of the mines, and the levels, in Lucite and all that in that little mine thing: these were all made to support this case, a great many of them. They used to have geologists and all them working around the clock, making all these scale models of mines, graphs, and everything. They would bring that into the court. Both sides would fight their case out. Through the local courts, the State Supreme Court, and then the United States Supreme, the ruling was made in favor of Anaconda.

When Clark did that, he said, “Fine. You buy me out.” He sold them the *Free Press*, which was his newspaper, this railway system, the water company, the Columbia Gardens. He sold all these to Anaconda. As time went on, Anaconda, like I said, being a giant corporation and a stock-holder owned corporation...the railway, the street cars weren’t made of money, so get rid of them. They took them out, put in busses, and covered the streets. Each little thing went by itself. The *Free Press* paper was closed up. They owned the *Anaconda Standard* and the *Butte Miner*. They owned those two, so why have another one? As time went on, they gradually went into the things that made money. Anything that didn’t make money: get rid of it.

Of course, the Gardens was kind of a social thing. You promote it for the workers and their families; a place for them to go. It took a little upkeep. When we were kids, Clark had a zoo out
there and everything. It was great when you were you a kid. You went to see the bears and all this. He had buffalos, and he had just everything.

He had a flower setup that was out of this world. He had a flower shop in there. These men were paid to grow this stuff all year long. Then they would transplant it to make these emblems, like I was just telling you, on the side of the hill. They were just beautiful emblems. When the Gardens would close in the fall of the year, they’d open the gates, and all these kids could go in, these little girls, and pick flowers. Some of the little boys, I guess. They’d make little bouquets out of them. They could pick all of the flowers because the year was over. Then they’d take and transplant a lot of that into these hot houses, and they were kept up all year.

They had a fish hatchery out there. They had a billion of all different games for the kids that little kids could play all the way through; a big ice cream parlor, and a dance pavilion that was second to none. I don’t know if it was on springs or not, but it was a resilient floor. In the early days, we had some of the most famous bands come through; big orchestras would come through here. Sunday nights, you could go to a dance at the gardens. In the summer, they had beautiful, big dances Sunday nights. They had what they called a winter garden ballroom here. That’s over there where that plumbing outfit is now on South Montana Street. They would play there. They had dances all over the place. Every night, you could dance in town in those days. In Meaderville, in the Rocky Mountain Café, he would hire these big dance bands to come down there like at midnight and play until four or five in the morning.

That was going 24 hours a day because gambling was wide open. Everything was wide open. You had restaurants. You had maybe eight or ten or twelve restaurants 24 hours a day. Women could walk the streets at two in the morning, three in the morning, like these waitresses during their shifts. Never a thing said to them. Never a (unintelligible) thing said to any of them. It was a great time in those days, a very trusting time in those days. I guess Matt told you about the women over there.

HB: A little bit. Not a lot.

RG: He didn’t? In those days, you had, like I say, eight or ten thousand single men working in these mines. Of course, you had to have some divergent interest for them. They had maybe two or three streets of these girls. They must have had a thousand girls down there to take care of the divergence of these men. It meant that you...they had it pretty well controlled, I guess, by the police department and all. They probably left the thing wide open because it was either that or something else would happen. A woman could walk the streets of Butte and never have a darn thing ever said to her at any time of the night or day.

We had a big Chinatown in those days too, down there on East Galena and East Mercury, and through that alleyway there between Main Street and Colorado Street. There was a large Chinese population there. We used to hear that they had undergrounds. There were two or
three floors underground and there were opium dens and everything else. Whether there was or not, I don’t know. Chinese were very much in their own community.

Very few Negros. In fact, today there’s not very many Negros here. We always thought it was the cold climate maybe kept them out of here. If they liked maybe the warmer climate, I don’t know.

The Chinese...in the early days, there was a great many of them here, until one time there was a tong war here. That would be like when I was high school. We had a fellow named Jere “The Wise” [Jeremiah Joseph Murphy], who was a very tough cop, chief of police. Every morning for maybe two weeks, they’d pick up one or two dead Chinese on the street or in the alley. It come to find out that there was two or three Tongs that were having a war with each other. This started like down in Frisco [San Francisco] or maybe in Seattle someplace, Los Angeles maybe. They were coming in here and they were finding out these different leaders of clans, or whatever they were. I don’t know how these tongs operate. It was getting to be where the people were getting a little bit leery of it. Somebody went every day; it was such a repetitive thing.

Jere “The Wise” took...his chief deputy was a fellow named Bart Riley, one of these football players. Bart was about six feet six inches and weighed about 280. He couldn’t impress you, no one could. All he had to do was stand there and look down on you. He took him and a couple of his other men down there. They were tough policemen in those days. They had to be. He told this Chinese man, he said, “I want all the members,”—the heads of these Tongs—“here at a certain time. I want to talk to them.”

Two o’clock, he met them at the Chinese noodle parlor. He said, “Now, I’m going to tell you once, and this is the only time I’m going to tell you. If I find one more dead Chinaman in this town—I don’t care where—but if I find him, every Chinese in this town is going to be taken down and put in a boxcar. It’s going to be padlocked, and they’re going to get out of here. The first one I find back,” he said, “my men are to have orders to shoot. I’m not going to tell you again. One more dead Chinaman.” Within the next week, the heads of these Tongs, I guess, drifted out, and we got down to a very small settlement of Chinese just a block or two of Chinese. They had real nice Chinese restaurants back in those days. We still have one or two, probably, nice Chinese restaurants. This is the way the Chinese population of the old days...When they got to where they fighting among themselves, (unintelligible).

HB: What kind of things where there to do downtown for entertainment? I’ve heard that there were great shows here.

RG: Yes, we had a great many shows. The Broadway Theater was where all the big vaudeville shows came. The Empress Theater...Butte ran up to around 90,000, I’m sure in those days, in population, after the First World War because copper was in demand and everything was blooming up coming into the Depression times. They would bring in these famous singers and
all these famous shows. They would play either at the Broadway or the Empress. Then you had picture shows like the American, the Orpheum, the Liberty, the Palo Alto, the Park, the Ansonio. You had all of these theaters and they were always going pretty full blast. You had famous orchestras that would come to play through the week like Tommy Dorsey. All of them orchestras came through at one time or another. Entertainment was just great that way.

Then you had all the gambling. You had the Morter Trade (?), the M & M [Bar], all the places down in Meaderville. You had all of those, and gambling was wide open. You could see...in fact, this was the Vegas of the West in the early days. After the Depression, many of the dealers left and went down here to Reno and eventually even Vegas. You’ll find a great many Butte people still very prominent in Vegas in gambling, and also in Reno. You had the M & M and the Rocky Mountain [Café] were the two big ones. I’d say the Rocky Mountain on a Saturday night...the men got paid in the mines like on Friday and Saturday. In those days, they got paid in cash. Heck, the first thing they did was end up in one of these gambling joints and (unintelligible). Saloons, they were open 24 hours a day. There was an awful lot of them and a lot of restaurants. Saturday night down in Meaderville, in the Rocky Mountain, you could probably count 80,000...100,000 dollars in silver dollars at these different tables.

You couldn’t tell until trouble started, but they’d have 15 or 20 of the toughest men in town as bouncers. We had one man at the M & M on Main Street whose name was Luke Thomas. The big thing for the young fellows when they come off shift in the mines in those days was they’d be downtown having a drink at a bar, and they’d start laying bets. They’d pick maybe the toughest kid in the bunch to go over and fight Luke. He would lay out more men in a week than you see in some of these areas in months. Every night, he had to prove himself. He was a fellow who never drank, never smoked; did an awful lot of walking. His main object in training was to go out there by the Columbia Gardens, and go up the top of the mountain and back. He climbed the mountain and back. This would give him more wind strength. He was always in marvelous condition, but he had about eight or ten fellows with him in the M & M. There was three brothers and there was maybe seven other bouncers in there just to make sure that nobody got out of line in the place.

Luke would fight all these little fights. He would ask these fellows, “Come on, I’ll buy you a drink. Let’s forget it. I don’t want to fight with you.” Once he got mad, there was no stopping him because you were laid out on your side in a fight (?). He had a tremendous temper. He couldn’t control it once he started, but he’d do anything to dissuade you from fighting.

One night, I was selling papers in a place called Walkers. He was in there having a bowl of soup. They had stools, where you sit on the stool. It was a pipe going up and a stem on top of the pipe. The seat was on the stem. They could take it right out of there. They had quite a gambling place there and quite a drinking place. There was four little Mexican fellows there back by these gambling tables. A man went over to Luke, and he told Luke, “I want you to keep an eye on those four fellows. I just heard them saying they’re going to gang up on you.” Apparently, he beat one of their men sometime before. He goes on having his bowl of soup before he went on
shift. When he noticed them coming over, he got up out of the chair, he picked the chair up, and he laid all four of them out by the time he was through. He took them out and he put them outside on the sidewalk. He laid them out on the sidewalk to get them out of the way.

In the meantime, a fellow went over. There was a policeman named Tom Nixon that they used to kid a lot. He was a big Irishman. He wasn’t supposed to be very smart. He was a really nice guy. They went over to get Tom Nixon. He was in a little place keeping warm on Main Street there, Larry Bruyer’s (?) taxi stand or something. Nixon went over and he called what they called the paddy wagon in those days. It was a sort of a police patrol thing with a wire cage around it. They’d put them in it, lock the door, and take them up to the police station. He called that up, he come over, and they put these four little Mexicans in the back of it. They said, “Tom, what are you going to charge them with?”

He said, “Disturbing the peace.”

They put the four little Mexicans in jail that night. This Luke was a tough guy.

These are things they did when they’d come off shift. There was a lot of fighting in those days among themselves, like two fellows working in the mines may have a dispute or didn’t get along. It may be a football game or a bet. The thing then was to go downtown and they’d settle it. Sometime through the night, they’d settle it down in any part of the town.

There was a lot of entertainment, a lot of good shows, and a lot of dances. You could dance every night of the week. You had places like the Lewis Hall, the Elks’ Club, Carpenters’ Union Hall, the KC, and the YMCA. They had dances all over. A lot of local orchestras. You also had a lot of local talent for plays. I remember in grade school you always had year-end plays. At the end of the year, they would end up in the Broadway. They would put on a group of these schools in a big play.

The brothers in the high school here...we had a high school taught by Irish Christian brothers, up until the last couple of years. Now they’re brothers and sisters both. The girls all went to their school that was taught by nuns, and we went to our high school and were taught by these Irish Christian brothers. They put on marvelous plays. They would put on two different plays a year. They taught Irish dancing, tumbling—tumbling still goes on—and scepter swinging, and just all of this stuff. Through the course of the years, they would teach this.

They had good football teams. In fact, one of their football teams...Danny Hanley, who graduated in our class of ’29, he played with Notre Dame two years. The reason he didn’t play full time was in his last year...in his junior year, he got in a car accident in Chicago. That hurt him a little bit, so then he wasn’t a full-time regular in the fourth year. That was just after the “Four Horsemen” of Notre Dame offense. They were out of there in ’25 and he went there in 1930...’29 and the ’30s. He was quite a football player. We had an awful lot of kids who went
out to these big teams, in California and back through the East, to come play football and basketball.

HB: Did you play some sports, too?

RG: When I got out of high school, I weighed 105 pounds and I was about five feet four inches. (laughs). Mostly, we played independents. There were a lot of independent teams, what we called the employed boys’ teams when we got out of high school. That was during the Depression. I got out the year of the Depression. We had maybe 15, 20, basketball teams of employed boys. Football was the same way. We’d have a lot of football teams, neighborhood teams that would play each other. The high school still had their own team, so we’d play them too.

HB: How long after you got out of high school did you get married?

RG: We got married on the ten year plan. We started going together about 1932. Then we started saving our money. Of course, we weren’t working. I didn’t get to work until ’35, except for the government work. We got married in 1940. By the time we got married, and had our dishes bought, and our silver bought, and a lot of things bought (laughs)...We still weren’t making very much money in those days. Ninety dollars a month was my salary when we got married. Imagine what it is now.

HB: After you got married, where did you live then? Where did you move?

RG: In Butte here. On Silver Street.

HB: On Silver Street.

RG: We’ve moved once in our married life.

HB: Did a lot of people do that: move just maybe very little? Or buy one house and stay there for the rest of their lives?

Unidentified Female Speaker [likely Richard Grace’s wife]: I think that’s true of people our age.

HB: Did you ever think about moving away from Butte?

RG: Yes, we thought about it, but we never did. (laughs)

HB: Do you think...?

RG: I think it was more of family and money circumstances or things like this.
HB: Do you think that Butte’s really a lot different from anywhere else in Montana?

RG: I think, in a number of ways, it is, yes. I think it’s much more of a closer community than a great many places. Butte, I think, and Frisco are a bit alike. It’s much more of a friendlier and closer tie with people than a great many areas, like Los Angeles. You don’t get too chummy in Los Angeles. Young people will mix with some young people, but even they are pretty restricted. You don’t know if you’re (unintelligible). I think a lot of other communities...I think it’s because you’ll find more native, homegrown people here. You go down to Billings, and you run into people from the Dakotas, Wyoming, and all around moving in. If you go to Missoula, you run into, again, a lot of people moving in. Great Falls, it’s a great deal like this, too, with the Air Force, and people moving from other areas in there.

I think, in Butte, it’s been more of a steadier...Again, it’s getting to be older people. Younger people have been moving out of here. I think this is what makes the difference. You’ll find more people know more people Butte than you’ll find in a lot of place. If you walk down the street, and you see somebody three or four times, it’s nothing to say hello to them. You think nothing of it. You don’t feel like they want something, or they’re after something. You may never know their name, but you’ll be friendly just by saying hello. You might even talk about weather and things like this as you go along. One never seems to expect anything of the other. Is that the way you see it, Mary?

UFS: You walk along with a smile on your face and on everybody’s face too.

RG: You don’t see that a great deal in other areas, I don’t think, too much. At least, I haven’t experienced it too much in other areas. Like in California, I’d see somebody I thought looked exactly like somebody here, until you get right up to them. Then you say, Hello, and he looks at you like (laughs)...They wonder what you’re after, or what you want.

HB: Besides this friendliness and other things like that, is there anything else special about Butte? Did Butte, as a town, have any special traditions besides Miners Union Day?

RG: I don’t know how to answer that one.

HB: For example, St. Patrick’s Day, which is (unintelligible). Is that a whole town celebration, or is that mainly the Irish?

RG: Yes, you have a lot of those. You had the Italian day too, didn’t you?

UFS: But I think St. Patrick’s Day is different. Everybody gets out and celebrates St. Patrick’s Day.

RG: For some reason or other, they made more out it. When I was a kid, on St. Patrick’s Day...you had nine parochial schools. You had as many parochial schools here as you had public schools. In other words, Butte in those days was practically 50-60 percent Catholic, I would say,
or maybe a little more. When we were kids, Father Hammond was the pastor at St. Mary’s. We would march from the school, way up north there, down Main Street. We’d have a white shirt and an orange stash, our blue trousers, and a little green tie. The whole school would parade, and all the other schools would parade. They had what they called a Pierson Community Band. It was all fife. It was maybe a hundred men playing these flutes. They would lead this parade.

At that time, there was great trouble in Ireland. There was the Irish Republic and the Irish Free State. There was great trouble in Ireland, and there was bitter rivalry here. That is, bitter spite between the two factions here. Mostly, you had here Irish Republic. They wanted their freedom from England. They were trying to fight all of the oppression England was putting in on them. For this reason, I think there was kind of sides taken to favor the Irish by a lot of these other nationalities that kind of knew a little bit about the history of it. I think, for this reason, maybe St. Patrick’s Day was more celebrated than like...

The Austrians had what they called a Mesopust. That was a big...I think it was a week-long celebration. We used to have a great time at that down on South Montana Street. The Italians would have their day. The Finn people would celebrate...down on the East Side. We’d go down there sometimes when we were kids. They’d have big celebrations. Each one celebrated their own little...

The Jewish people had their celebrations, but they were mostly by themselves. Jewish people didn’t mix that much. I don’t know. Everybody seemed to think that the poor old Jewish people were after all their money. Of course, they made money. They knew how to make money. But they were great people. You take Wein’s Clothing Store. It was a Jewish operated store, and it was just excellent. He had a great reputation. He was well liked by the whole community. Many were well liked people, but, for some reason, they did keep more to themselves in their celebrations and their religion.

I think this is why St. Patrick’s Day is made more of, maybe on account of the Free State Home Rule bitter feeling and the Irish Famine that was just before the time of all the people coming here...coming out of Ireland. This may have had a lot more to do with it.

HB: It seems to me, in talking to people about Butte, that the Irish customs were real important here. Do you think that was just because the Irish were more visible, or was it because there were more of them?

RG: The Irish were very strong in their feeling. For instance, when World War Two came, and the American soldiers were going into England to prepare for the invasion and also up in Ireland, southern Ireland wouldn’t let them in. They didn’t want to get mixed in this war. They didn’t want nothing to do with the Germans, nothing to do with anyone. They wanted to stay independent because Ireland is one country that America or any country has never sent anything to them. You ever realize that? They don’t have one dime of foreign that I can ever find out about. In the early days, they did have a big drive here. I remember my mother gave
money in a bond, an Irish bond. She paid so much a month until she had a 50-dollar bond. They had a lot of that to finance their fight for freedom against the Black and Tan, the English. They were all paid back. As time went on, my mother was paid back. This is the only form of help or aid that Ireland ever got from anywhere.

They wanted to be independent and they wanted to stay without getting mixed up either way. I said to my mother one day, “We’ll put all our American troops in Ireland.”

She said, “You’ll never put them in Ireland.”

I said, “Why not?”

She said, “We’ll kill all of them if they come in there! If anybody comes in, we’ll kill them!”

They were very strict and very strong this way, yet they were very good Americans. They were very strong feeling of Irish too. I don’t know if this true...I guess this is true of a lot of...She was from Ireland. We were born in America. I imagine it’s the same, like with Finnish people and all the rest of them. There’s a very strong heritage for them, along with a very strong bond of American feelings. Of course, that’s what made America stronger yet. I think the Irish encountered this back...

[End of Interview]