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Interviewee: Tom F. Sullivan  
Interviewer: Bernadette Sweeney  
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Bernadette Sweeney: This is Bernadette Sweeney. We are recording an interview with Tom Sullivan for The Gathering. We are in Tom’s home on Washburn Street, Missoula and it’s October 27, 2010. So Tom to start off, tell me a little about your Irish background or as much as you know.

Tom Sullivan: Sure. I was born in Butte in 1956. I went to St. Anne’s Catholic grade school and then I went on to Butte Central High School. I graduated in 1974. Then I went to Eastern Montana College in Billings and ended up finishing at the University of Montana in a Social Work degree in 1983.

BS: And that’s here in Missoula?

TS: Yes. Where do you want to go from there?

BS: Your family background?

TS: My father, Frances Leo Sullivan, was born in Butte in 1921 or 1922. He lived on Alabama Street. He had five siblings. His father was Quin Sullivan, who was born in Ireland in a little village of Eyeries, West Cork, Beara Peninsula. My grandmother was Katherine (?) Murphy born in Eyeries, County Cork, Beara Peninsula. They came to America roughly in the late 1890s. They came to New York and ended up in Butte. I am not sure why Butte. I would imagine because there was employment. And I did hear a story that Marcus Daly went over to Eyeries, knowing that these people were copper miners and he persuaded people to come over to Butte and there would be jobs and lodging and a new way of life.

BS: Yes, so were your grandparents married when they left Ireland?

TS: No. They were probably...I think they were about 12 or 13. They had never met each other in Ireland. They met each other in Butte.

BS: But they were both from Eyeries?

TS: Yes.

BS: My goodness. It is a very small town.

Tom Sullivan Interview, OH 435-013, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
TS: Yes, I’ve been there. It’s very small. It’s remarkable and I’m not sure how they met. I don’t know if my mom knows. But they got married in St. Mary’s Church in--- I believe it was in 1910. Is that what I said before, do you remember? But I believe it was at the St. Mary’s church. Quin worked as a...I know he was a miner for a while and then he was a clerk of some sort. I think he was a clerk for the Anaconda Company. He did not want his sons to be miners, I know. My oldest uncle, Joe, died at the age of 18 of, I think, pneumonia. And then my Uncle Dan and my Aunt Mary and then Father Bud, Bernard and then my father, Frances and then my other Aunt Margie, Margaret. They all went to Boy’s Central and Girl’s Central which it was labeled back then.

BS: And Father Bernard was known as Father Bud?

TS: He was known as Father Bud. He was ordained in 1944 in Butte. He was a parish priest and he started up in Anaconda at St. Peter’s. He was a principle at Anaconda Central and then went to Dillon, then went to Helena. He build St. Mary’s Church in Helena and then he went to Thompson Falls, then he went to Columbia Falls and he retired in 1989 and moved to Helena for his retirement.

BS: And he passed away when?

TS: In 2005. Father Bud was the Vicar General. He was also Chaplin of the Montana legislature while he resided in Helena and then when he retired, he really didn’t retire—well he did retire, but I mean they were utilized very much so he would travel around Western Montana spelling priests, giving them vacations. He did different things like that.

BS: And you mentioned last week you were very close to Father Bud.

TS: Yes, my dad died in 1965. I had just turned 10 and Bud, I believe, was in Dillon then, I believe. He was very instrumental in my life. My mom then raised us. My older sister, Kate was...Excuse me, I was nine and she was 13. My sister Sheila was 10 and my little sister, Colleen was three.

BS: What did your mother do?

TS: My dad luckily worked for the federal government and so she had...We were on Social Security I know, you know survivor benefits? She went to work for Dr. John Morris who is like our third cousin, my mom’s second cousin and he was a dentist in Butte. She worked for him for probably 12 or 14 years and then she went and worked at Butte Central for about another maybe 20 years. I’m not sure. She was a secretary. She was like the person you would talk to when you walked in. She was the head office person, right underneath Laverne (word unintelligible).

BS: Oh, I’ve heard of Laverne (laughing).
TS: She was unbelievable (laughing). Laverne was unbelievable. My mom told me Laverne could do every student’s schedule in her head and not need a computer. Well, when I graduated from Butte Central we had 670 kids in our school. Now it’s down to like 140 or 130 but when we were there it was a big high school. I think the biggest year was the year before me, I think there was close to 700 that year.

BS: Tell me about your great-grandfather.

TS: Well, Father Bud told me the most about him. I went to Ireland with Father Bud in 1984. Our cousin, Mary O’Shea (?)...I’m trying to think how I’m related to Mary O’Shea. Bill O’Shea (?) is her father. He owned a pub in Castletownbere called O’Shea’s Pub (laughing). I cannot remember how Mary was related to us now. But she had met Father Bud on previous trips to Ireland. He made a pilgrimage there. He took my mom and sister over there. He took various groups over to Ireland so she called him and asked him if he would marry her. So that’s why he and I went. She married a fellow by the name of Cornelius O’Harrington (?). So Bud performed the ceremony in a Catholic church in...It was either in Eyeries or Castletownbera. I can’t remember now. It was a beautiful old church. And then we went up to Kenmare for the reception. My great-grandfather, who was born in Ireland, in talking to my mom last night, she believed he was a farmer. He had two wives. His first wife died. She had nine children. And then he married a younger lass, I’m not sure how old she was. And they had 16 children. Yes, well the total was 27 so whatever they had.

BS: That’s unbelievable.

TS: That is unbelievable. And Bud and I went to the house where Quin was raised. Quin, my grandfather died like in 1956, the year I was born. My grandmother died, his wife Kate (?) Murphy Sullivan, died in 1955. So Father Bud showed me the house. It was unbelievably small. I can’t even imagine how they did it.

BS: Yes, it’s kind of hard to fathom.

TS: So what Bud told me was half of those...my grandfather’s siblings came to America and the other half stayed there.

BS: Right. And do you know do they stay in touch after they came to America? Do you know anything about them?

TS: Boy, they were pretty much all dead by the time I was around. My dad kept in touch with a lot of his relatives and I know Father Bud did. But, and I know we met some brothers, who I guess would be my great uncles and great aunts when I went to Eyeries and Castletownbera. Yes we did meet them and I got to admit it’s been so long I can’t remember now. But I remember Bud knew them because he had been there. I remember going over to many, many
peoples’ houses that we were related to, but it’s all scrambled now (laughing). As far as America goes, you know, my uncles were dead by the time...Like my godfather Dan, my dad’s older, brother died when I was like in sixth grade. My uncle Ray died, his older brother, when I was a senior in high school. So I really didn’t get to hardly know them. I didn’t really get to know my dad. So Bud was really only the only Sullivan male that I got to know. Amazingly out of all those 27 children (laughing), Bud was the only Sullivan male and I’m the only one left. And I don’t have any children. I have a stepson, but I don’t have any children of my own. So our whole thing will vanish off the face of...It’s unbelievable. My dad, Joe, that was killed, he died at 20 of illness. Dan did not have any children, my uncle Ray did not have any children, Bud was a priest so we assume he did not have any children (laughing), and that was it. So we were the only kids in the family.

BS: What about your mother’s side of the family.

TS: My mother’s mother, Katherine McGrath (?) was born in Butte and she married a fellow by the name of Robert Benny (?) who was...He was born in Utah. And they lived in Park City and he was a miner in Park City. He died when my mom was nine. So my grandma, my mom’s mom, Katherine McGrath, her name was Katherine Benny of course, then moved my mom, her older sister, Mary Lou who...my aunt still lives in Billings—Sweeney is her name. My uncle Bob Benny to Butte and her mother, Bridgett McGrath ran a boarding house in Butte on Copper Street called The Lighthouse. So my grandma at that time then earned enough money to buy the Hillcrest Hotel on Park Street. She sold that and then bought the Lincoln Hotel in March of 1947. So I assume she bought the Hillcrest in the ‘30’s sometime, mid or late ‘30’s.

BS: And The Lighthouse was the first one and that was on Copper Street?

TS: That was the boarding house that Bridgett McGrathf (?), my great-grandmother ran. And according to my mom, what they did is they...She said there was 30-40 beds and men just rotated in and out of those beds because these mines were open 24 hours a day so they slept in shifts. My great-grandma provided a lunch for the miners as they were heading off to work. Butte was 100,000 people back then. So I never met my great-grandmother. I got to know my grandmother quite well, my mother’s mother. She remarried in about 1946 to a fellow by the name of Tim Dugan who is my step-grandfather. He was from Chicago originally. He was a bartender in Butte at the Arrow Club, I believe. I’ll have to ask my mom on that one. But when they bought the Hillcrest in Lincoln, he helped my grandma. My grandma died then...She ran the Lincoln Hotel probably until 19...let me think...early 1980s and then she went into the Kress (?) Nursing Home. She had dementia and she lived there for probably 10 years. So she lived a long time in the Kress Nursing Home. She died in 1989 and then my step-grandfather, Tim Dugan, died in 1987 a couple of years before her. Yes. I did not come to his funeral. I was too far away. So where do you want to go from here?

BS: So your mother was a Benny?
TS: My mother was a Benny. And Robert Benny is Scottish. He was born in...Excuse me, his father was born in...his name was Jim Benny, my mom’s dad’s name was Jim Benny. His father was born in Bin (?) Hill, Scotland. My mom’s grandmother was born in Kirby, Utah and her name was Minette. She was half Welsh and we think a quarter Irish and a quarter French Canadian Native, and she was olive skinned, dark hair. And my cousin, Bob Benny’s oldest daughter, is olive skinned, dark hair. So that’s about all I know about Bridgett. Bridgett Morris (word unintelligible) that would be my mom’s grandmother, who was born in Ireland married Anthony Morris (word unintelligible). And they were from Bally (word unintelligible)

BS: Bally (word unintelligible) maybe?

TS: That’s it. Is that right on the border between (word unintelligible) and (word unintelligible)?

BS: Could be.

TS: Bud and I did go up there. We did not have any names to call, but Bud knew them. That’s where my mom’s family was from. They have dairy cows in Ireland right in town. They were dairy farmers. When I went to Ireland in ’84 my cousin, Patrick Murphy, I don’t have any brothers, but I look just like him. He was probably six years older than me. He was a dairy farmer in Eyeries. He married a lady by the name of Mary O’Sullivan, no relation. He had five boys. I have often wondered how they are.

BS: We could talk a little bit about your trip to Ireland. You went in 1984?

TS: Yes.

BS: And what age would you have been 20—

TS: Twenty-seven.

BS: And you went with Father Bud.

TS: Yes, and my Aunt Mary O’Boyle, Bud’s older sister.

BS: Did you go for long?

TS: A month.

BS: And what did you think of that?

TS: I loved it. I didn’t want to come home. We flew into Shannon and then we immediately went down to Eyeries and we stayed in a B&B. The lady’s name was Mary O’Sullivan, no relation. We stayed there for, I’m going to say, for 10 days at least and I went on to Cornelius’
bachelor party of course at O’Shea’s pub, his future father-in-law and Conn (?)—we called him Conn—he had about eight brothers and I got to...you know, it was quite an experience for me. The one thing that would amaze me. I would walk into a pub in Ireland, and I wouldn’t say a word. I wouldn’t open my mouth and the bartender would say “Yank, what do you want?”

I would say “How do you know I’m a Yank?”

He goes “Oh, I know you’re a Yank.” That happened every place I went. It was unbelievable. So then Bud married them and we went to the reception. It was unbelievable. She invited the whole village. They had it in shifts. Like there was the first shift...the reception was like 3:00 to 7:00 and the second one was like 8:00 to 11:00 or something like that. That was quite the experience. After that we went back to Eyeries and then a couple of days later we toured the island. We did go to Bere Island, yes, we took the ferry over there to watch my oldest, Patrick Murphy’s oldest son, I think it was, Patrick Jr. play Gaelic football. It was really cool. That was while we were there that ten days. Let’s see what else we did. We just visited relatives pretty much during those ten days there. We didn’t really go anywhere, just kind of hung around Eyeries and Castletownbera. We really didn’t go anywhere. Just to Kenmare for the reception. Then we went on a tour of the island and I remember we went to...it’s not Babb...Cobh and then we didn’t go into Cork City. We went to the outskirts of Cork City and then we went to Blarney Castle and then we went on...I remember stopping at Inniskillin at that time the nine counties were occupied by British militia, and I remember driving up to a check point at Inniskillin. I remember rolling down my window and a black...my brother-in-law is black. I have nothing against black people (laughing). He was a black British militia guy with a semi-automatic weapon and he looked at me and he goes, “Yank, I want to see your American Express or your driver’s license. What in the hell are you doing here?” It was pretty intimidating. So I got out. He frisked me, frisked my aunt, went through the car. I looked at Bud and I go, “There is no reason to go up here.” There was no reason to go to Belfast, so we did not go to Belfast.

BS: So you turned around at the border?

TS: Nope, we went to Donegal. We spent a couple of days in Donegal which was really fun. Then we went down to Galway and then just kind of to Kilkenny. I guess we went to Kilkenny. Is Kilkenny by there?

BS: I guess by Montana standards it is.

TS: I guess we went to Kilkenny—I think on our way from Shannon to Eyeries, but we just toured the island and we just landed back in Shannon. We went to Bunratty Castle, we went to Durty Nelly’s and I remember going to a medieval banquet.

BS: I’m from very close to there.

TS: I guess it’s south of there.
BS: Ennis is just 16 miles from Bunratty. Ennis is northwest of Bunratty.

TS: I really liked Galway too and I know my friend Dan (word unintelligible) was from Galway, from Anaconda, because he has the black hair and I remember the story of the Spanish Armada floating in and the survivors and—

BS: You reckon that’s where Dan gets it from (laughing)?

TS: I guess so (laughing). And his wit. He’s unbelievable.

BS: So when you went to Ireland in 1984, what was it like? Was it as you expected it would be?

TS: Better.

BS: Yes, why? I know you haven’t been back since.

TS: No. You know I really felt like I was at home and when I was 27, I was not married. I really did not know what I wanted to do. America to me just seemed greedy. We were just a greedy people, and I put myself into that lot of people. When I went over there it was very refreshing to see my relatives. They had nothing. They didn’t have a car. They barely had electricity and they were the happiest people in the world.

BS: Yes, but you missed the boom, when we all got really greedy (laughing).

TS: Yes, I know (laughing).

BS: I throw myself into that. But now of course, there is the crash and everybody is having to try go back—

TS: Yes, just like it is here. But I remember coming back to America and my good friend got married, one of my best friends. I was in his wedding and I felt out of place. I didn’t like it. I wanted to go back. I had met a couple of girls over there that I got to spend a little time with. It was a wonderful experience. It was unbelievable. The road not taken. And so I was at that age, I guess, you know when you are 27 and I just kind of didn’t know what I wanted to do with my life. It just seemed like it fit. I really felt at peace. I felt “I’m home.”

BS: Really. And of course you were because so many people there were your people.

TS: Yes and I didn’t have...All my relatives in Butte were girls. Bob Benny has four girls and a boy and the boy is like 12 years younger than me so I was the only boy growing up. So when I went to Ireland there were men my age that I look like. I don’t have any brothers so that was very refreshing, and I definitely look like a Murphy. There is no question that I’m a Murphy. I really
looked like Patrick Murphy. It was unbelievable. He was a pioneer. I remember him telling me alcohol never touched his lips, which I thought was astounding. I really admired him. He had five boys. They were all boys, you know. I just felt at home, I guess and at peace. I don’t know what I would have done for a living there (laughing). I guess I could go to work on a dairy farm with Patrick. So I came back to America. It took me awhile to adjust to be quite honest. I do remember that. I was living in Missoula at that time and it took me awhile. I remember people were just so greedy here. Nobody’s happy. Everybody wants more.

BS: And your Uncle, Father Bud went back a lot, didn’t he?

TS: Yes he did. I’m trying to think how many times he went after that. I know he went in ’89. I remember he took my little sister, Colleen and my mom and a group of parishioners from Columbia Falls, kind of on a pilgrimage to Ireland and the Vatican. He was there several times.

BS: Yes, and when you came back then, we talked a little bit last week about other places that you lived in. You lived in Hawaii for a number of years.

TS: I did. I lived in Hawaii from 1985 to 1990. I got married in Hawaii to a girl from Kalispell. I moved to Kalispell from here like in 1984, that year. And then I met a girl who was living in Hawaii and she was home for the summer and I met her during the summer. I was selling wine at the time. I was a wine salesman. She was going back to Hawaii in January and at that time we were living together and she said “Why don’t you come to Hawaii.” And I thought, why not, I’ve never been there. So I did. And we ended up getting married there in October of ’86 on Maui. We lived on Maui. I taught kindergarten and waited tables, that’s what I did.

BS: And you said you found it very different culturally speaking.

TS: I was a minority. I think everybody should be a minority. It took six months for people...Let me rephrase that. It took me six months working at the Intercontinental before people accepted me. Because they knew I was going to stay and they knew I just wasn’t there for the short term. But once they accept you, they are the most gracious loving people I have ever met. I loved it. They were unbelievable. There were Japanese, Chinese, Philippina, Samoan and a lot of white people too. There were white people too. Several times you would walk into a store and you would be the only white person in there. That’s different. But it was good for me. I moved there when I was 29 and left when I was 34. It was a really good experience.

BS: So when you left you came back to Kalispell?

TS: Kalispell. I lived there for about a total of 18 years.

BS: And what did you do in Kalispell?
TS: I worked at Northwest Montana Human Resources which is a nonprofit agency in Kalispell as a case manager in a federal job training program working with at-risk youth. I got divorced here in ’01 and I moved to Missoula in ’03.

BS: And you are working with the Job Service.

TS: I work at Missoula Job Service. I work for the State of Montana now, very similar to what I did in Kalispell, just a little different, but very similar.

BS: Kalispell, as well as in Missoula, do you find much in a way of identifying with of your Irish heritage.

TS: I can give you an example. Usually Butte boys outnumber Anaconda boys in any town I have lived in, in Montana. In Kalispell it was vice versa. There was (name unintelligible) who was from Butte. He was raised in Dublin Gulch and myself from Butte and then there were probably eight Anaconda guys. We were all good friends because we just, we had the same morals. We were all different ages, they were older than me, but it didn’t matter. So Kevin Kelman (?) who was the oldest, he is 70 now. I’m 54, Kevin’s 70. So Kevin Kelman, Anaconda Central, Bobby Applegate, Anaconda Central, Dave Meredith, Anaconda Central, Jim, Pepper (?) Murphy, Anaconda Central, Curly Hanson, Anaconda Central. (name unintelligible) and myself would hop in a Suburban. In Butte at one time there was a railroad called the BA&P—the Butte, Anaconda and Pacific. So we would go down to this bar in Paradise, Montana where they had Harp and Guinness on draft, which is amazing because Paradise is in the middle of nowhere.

BS: Yes, I was just thinking, they have it on draft?

TS: So we would go down there and spend the afternoon. We did it once a year. We did it for about, probably ten years. Just as a bonding thing. Like, when I moved there, you were just friends instantly. I mean you didn’t even have to try. And we’ve been best friends ever since. And Kevin had the “snug” (word unintelligible) at his house in Kalispell on Main Street. Kevin was a teacher, a very good teacher. He worked with at-risk youth as well. He worked at the Alternative High School in Kalispell. He was the director. I often said he ran it like Anaconda Central. He was really tough, but fair.

He had a house on Main Street with the Irish flag flying proudly. The green and white, white with green trim and his kitchen he called “the snug”, which I thought was an all-male thing, but (laughing) I found out it was not. I thought the snug was a place where men went off in the bar to like smoke cigars and drink whiskey and talk about whatever. I mean that’s what I kind of envisioned.

BS: Well, I actually meant to confirm this with (word unintelligible) but I am almost sure that the snug was for the women, because the men would be in the bars smoking and drinking.
TS: That makes total sense. I just assumed this. So we could go into Kevin’s house at any time of the day, any time. It didn’t matter. Irish music was generally playing. A lot of times he wasn’t there. You could sit and have a beer with anybody you wanted, it didn’t matter. His house was always...you were always welcome.

BS: Was it open?

TS: Always open.

BS: Unlocked?

TS: Unlocked. 24 / 7. Unbelievable. He didn’t even have locks. I lived with Kevin after I got divorced. I lived there for a couple of years before I moved here. I lived in the basement. Kevin has twin boys that went to Carroll. Played football for Carroll. But anyway, it was quite funny, I would often comment to Pat Lee (?), my good friend Pat, who was from Butte and I would say “Pat, we’re outnumbered.” We jokingly called Anaconda people “Condons”. I’d go, “There’s more Condons than us.” They’re crazier than we are. But we were very good friends.

BS: Yes, I actually was talking to somebody from Anaconda on Monday. I (phrase unintelligible) until you moved further away within the state, and then suddenly the Anacondans would be partnering up.

TS: I’ll give you an example Dan (name unintelligible) and I played basketball games against each other, hated each other. I knew him since my freshman year in high school. We didn’t know each other, but it was just Anaconda and Butte.

BS: Yes.

TS: As soon as we went to Eastern in Billings, because everybody didn’t like us, they did not like us, the Anaconda people. They had an image of us that they didn’t like. So we pretty much---it was us against them. That’s pretty much the way it was at Eastern. It wasn’t that way here when I went to the University of Montana, but it was definitely that way there. So then you would just become instant friends. You had the same morals. You were raised the same way. Blue collar, lower middle class or whatever you want to call it. My mom was a widow. I didn’t ski or do anything. I played basketball I remember. We didn’t have any money to do nothing. I put my way through Central, Butte Central. So did my sister Sheila. Amazingly at Butte Central it only cost $30.00 a month back then and I ran our gymnasium at St. Anne’s every weekend, Saturday, Sunday for eight hours and I got paid $30.00 a month. My sister Sheila worked the rectory every weekend. She got paid $30.00 a month. We never saw it. There is no question. There was no question. It wasn’t like, where is it? But I would have gone to the gym anyway, because I just loved it, besides the girls (laughing). But I just loved playing basketball. So I probably would have been there anyway.
BS: So when you were growing up in Butte and going to Butte Central, what kind of social rituals were there, were there cultural events or—

TS: When I was a kid, pretty much everybody I knew were Democrats and they were Catholic. So I thought if you were a Republican, you were a Protestant and I remember I thought that until seventh grade. I don't know. There were no Protestants that I knew of anyway. Everybody was either Irish, Italian, Lebanese, Yugoslavian, Croatian, Serbian. Mostly Serbian, the Croatians lived in Anaconda generally speaking. That's a whole other story. I don't know we were just all lower middle class kids that...we didn't have anything. I don't know. Rituals?? I just delved into athletics.

Butte Central was a great school back then. We had probably three-quarters nuns. We had Christian Brothers and we had Sisters of Charity. We had the Christian Brothers who were out of Chicago and we had Sisters of Charity, I think out of Chicago too. But there was probably three-quarters of the staff was that. Maybe even 80 percent of 90 percent. There were very few lay teachers. We had a few, but not many. So we were basically raised by Christian Brothers and you could go home and tell your mom, “Oh, I got in trouble today,” or “Brother Murray is mean.” You didn’t go there.

BS: You’d get in trouble?

TS: You just kept your mouth shut. The Christian Brothers had a few tricks of that would keep us in line. Here, I’ll show you one.

BS: Do I want to know? (laughing)

TS: I won’t hurt you (laughing). I remember Brother Kelly used to do that. If you push in hard, it really hurts.

BS: Yes, I see. I’ll take your word for that.

TS: He had me on my knees many times. And I’ll tell you, you didn’t go it again.

BS: No.

TS: Brother Murray, I think he would probably do that. He was physically...I mean, you just minded and you didn’t go home and complain. You just didn’t. My mom would say you deserved it.

BS: Yes. St. Patrick’s Day in Butte growing up?

TS: You know we didn’t celebrate it back then. Not like they do now.
BS: Yes.

TS: You know, I don’t even remember St. Patrick’s Day growing up in Butte. You know we went to church. I don’t remember. You know the drinking age was 18. Things were a lot different back then. I do not remember a parade. We did not get out of school. Not back then and I went to school from ’70-’74. My memory is not great, but I do not remember a parade. I mean, I’m sure people celebrated it, but my first recollection is going to St. Patty’s Day parade in Butte like when I was probably close to 30 maybe. I know the Butte Celebration Committee just kind of started that I would guess in the mid 80’s maybe.

BS: Yes.

TS: But they really started promoting it and then it turned into just a massive...And then when we got (word unintelligible) seven years ago from Missoula, because he used to be here in Missoula and like Monica (word unintelligible). They did a wonderful job. I go every year. I will not miss it.

BS: Yes, it’s good fun.

TS: Unbelievable. So I guess (word unintelligible) I was a Hibernian for 20 years. I am not one here. I don’t know why I’m not one here. I should be. I was in Kalispell.

BS: Do you know Patrick Toomey (?)?

TS: I don’t.

BS: I’ll introduce you to him.

TS: Okay. Kevin Kelman was head of our Hibernian in Kalispell. We had quite a big chapter there. Who was the other guy—Red Gallagher. And we’d have a St. Patrick’s Day...I was living in Kalispell when I was married so I didn’t come down. You know Butte might probably have had one in the early ’80’s. By that time I was living up there and we had our own Hibernians party dinner at the Elk’s where we would...not dress up, but wear tweed sports coats and we’d have dinner and we’d have a guest speaker always from...Kevin would get somebody that was very witty and very funny. So that’s what we did in Kalispell. But there is quite a few Irish folks up in Kalispell.

BS: Yes. But you’re not involved with the (word unintelligible) down here.

TS: I have no idea why. I don’t know.

BS: And you played handball as well.
TS: I started playing handball in 1976. Mike (name unintelligible)...I was playing racquetball and I remember Mike said to me...I’m not going to repeat what Mike said to me (laughing). But I looked at Mike and I said, “No, I play handball, and I’m going to kick your butt.” But anyway Mike and I have been good friends for many, many...a long time. He was a year ahead of me and he went to Eastern as well. So I started playing handball with him and I got my good friend Rick Harrington to play handball. So we’ve been playing since 1976. So 34 years. I know Ricky went over to Ireland with his family and the world championships were in Ireland that year. Every three years they have it in a different place. In 2012 they are going to be back in Ireland and I am planning, hoping to go to that.

BS: Yes. Between 1984 and 2012, well, you’ll see some changes (laughing).

TS: Yes, I am definitely going to go and...yes. According to Rick in ’03 they had the tournament all over the place because there is no place I mean there are literally probably a thousand players maybe. Just Ireland alone...one of the best players in the world right now is from Ireland.

BS: Dan went to (word unintelligible).

TS: That’s right he did. I remember when Dan went. I had just moved here.

BS: He was in Kilkenny.

TS: Okay. Yes, I remember Danny Collins. That’s right. There were quite a few who went from here. Ricky went, my doubles partner, Mike Barrigan (?) went from Kalispell, Randy Johnson went from Kalispell. Danny went. I know there are some other ones from Missoula here that went. I think Dave Emmons might have went. I can’t remember if Dave went or not. Speaking of Dave, I took an Irish History class from and him in ’81 or ’82 before I graduated and so when I went to Ireland I had a lot of that fresh on my mind, which is really interesting.

BS: Yes, have you done any extracurricular courses or anything.

TS: No, that’s the last...Let me think. No remember Terry talking to me, Terry O’Riordan talking to me about...it was last fall. He was doing that night class; I think it was Monday or Tuesday night for 11 weeks in a row.

BS: The Irish language class?

TS: I think so. I really wanted to get into that and Rick couldn’t do it because he travels a little bit and I ended up not doing it. But I know right now, Dave Emmons is doing a class called the Butte Irish or the History of the Butte Irish or something like that on Thursdays.

BS: Like a class for members of the community.

Tom Sullivan Interview, OH 435-013, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
TS: Yes, because my good friend (name unintelligible) is taking it. I ran into him a few weeks ago. It’s like every Thursday from like 3:00 to 4:30 or something like that. It’s called the Butte Irish or something like that. I believe it’s for no credit you know just for community, because Dave’s retired. He’s a great professor. Dave and I became quite good friends.

BS: He’s a good man.

TS: He’s a very good man. He is. I don’t get to see Dave very often. A lot of my friends play at noon—handball at noon—and my work doesn’t allow me to do that. I have to play after work. So I try to play twice a week right now. I love it. I hope I’m going to play for a long time. But it is getting harder.

BS: You used to spend your summers up at Echo. How did that become part of your family?

TS: Yes, my mom’s mom, Katherine Dugan, Katherine McGrath Benny Dugan (?) bought that in 1949 or 1950 for $5000.00

BS: Right and it’s near Georgetown Lake. So how far from Butte is that?

TS: It’s like 48 miles from Butte or 45 miles.

BS: And she bought that as a holiday cabin?

TS: Yes, my Uncle Bob was 18 I think, 17 or 18. I remember my mom telling me that my uncle was encouraging his mother to buy something. They were looking at Georgetown is where they were originally looking. And then the fellow that owned the Finland (?) Hotel in Butte...I can’t remember his first name. He had this up for sale and my grandma went and looked at it and bought it. She had a priest bless it and then it burned down a week later.

BS: (laughing) I’m sorry.

TS: That’s all right (laughing). She had it insured thank God. So my Uncle Bob was 18 at the time or 19. He was going to school here, U of M. And my other uncle, Jack Sweeney, who was married to my mother’s sister, and a fellow by the name of Hans Hanson who built most of the cabins up at Echo Lake, it took them three summers to build it, but he rebuilt it. The only thing left standing was the chimney. We had an electrical line that comes kind of across our cabin. They figured it frayed and it started a fire.

BS: Yes, and did you spend much time there?

TS: My whole life. Every weekend growing up as a kid, we would go to Echo Lake, pretty much from Memorial Day through Labor Day. But then I played athletics so from Memorial Day to Labor Day, that was it. Have you ever been up there, which I know you have?
BS: Yes.

TS: It’s colder than hell.

BS: Yes (laughing).

TS: It can be (laughing). It’s either 7200 or 7400 feet high so it gets cold. So we turn the water off at the end of the season and then we don’t go back up there generally. If we get up there before Memorial Day, we feel pretty lucky. Just because of the snow. So now it’s been passed down to my generation. We bought it from my mother, my aunt and my uncle here a year ago. And now my sister Kate and myself and the five Benny kids own it. So there is seven of us.

BS: And when you’re up there do you fish?

TS: Fish, hike, play horseshoes, reminisce, relax. We go to Phillipsburg quite a bit—go to like the plays in Phillipsburg. In late August, my sister, Kate and I and my mom went to an Irish... What is it called? Vaudeville? It was short skits in the playhouse in P-Burg which is the oldest opera house in Montana, built in 1895 and the actors were portraying themselves in an irish pub—doing short skits. It was fantastic. So we really don’t do a whole lot. It’s not like we’re scaling mountains. I mean we just go up there for family and just to be together. My grandfather taught me how to play horseshoes. I’ve been playing horseshoes for 42 years maybe. Since I was 12 maybe or ten, maybe 44 years. A long time. So we play a lot of horseshoes. And there’s a lot of work, I mean we are always doing something it seems like up there. We did the roof a year ago, put a new roof on. We’re either chinking logs or staining logs or doing something it seems like. The winters are pretty tough on the structure up there. But every time I go up there I thank my grandma, every time for buying it, because I could never afford something like that. I couldn’t afford a piece of property at Georgetown or Echo. So just a lot of real good memories up there. I had Ricky’s bachelor’s party up there. Just a ton, ton of memories. My grandfather, Tim Dugan used to play whiffle ball up there, just right out in front. Just good memories. My grandma dressed to the nine’s with her furs. She always wore a fur wrap, gloves.

BS: She dressed like that at the cabin?

TS: Yes, nylons, dress shoes.

BS: Dress shoes (laughing)? Fantastic.

TS: Yes.

BS: She was a very serious lady.
TS: Very. She was decked at all times. I remember she handed me a 20 when I was in high school.

BS: That would be a lot. So in regards to The Gathering, what appealed to you about the project or why did you decide to sign up for The Gathering?

TS: Well, I’m proud of my Butte Irish heritage. I’m proud to be Irish and I guess it helped me to remember a lot and I’ve learned a lot and just sharing with other people.

BS: If you were to write a history or contribute to the history of the Irish in Montana, what do you think should be included?

TS: Oh, that’s a good question. It’s almost like Dave Emmons final question in Irish History class. How do you solve the Irish question? Would you state that again?

BS: If you were to write the History of the Irish in Montana what do you think should be included?

TS: Wow, I guess the first thing that comes to mind is faith, friendship, closeness, bonding, togetherness. I haven’t lived in that many cities, but I’ve never, ever been in a town remotely close like Butte. Maybe in Ireland I was, but I wasn’t in those towns long enough. When I retire I’m going back to Butte. I wouldn’t mind going to live in Ireland for a while. My friend, Dan (name unintelligible) and I are talking about that right now. But definitely I’m going to retire in Butte.

BS: You know that’s interesting because so many people retire back to Butte.

TS: I know, a lot of people. I’m kind of in the middle of the baby boom generation. I think it was like ’46 to ’63. I’m kind of right in the middle. But I know a lot of people in their mid ’60s, friends of mine, older brothers and sisters are moving back to Butte.

BS: It seems to be going against the logic of moving to the sun in your older years. A lot of people are going back to Butte.

TS: Do you know why I’d go back there?

BS: Why.

TS: One of the main reason...this isn’t the only reason, but I’m not married. I don’t have a wife, but I know if I go back to Butte that I’ll be taken care of.

BS: Really.
TS: No question. Now taking care of meaning...whatever that means. I don’t mean pampered or anything.

BS: Yes, there would be people there for you.

TS: Absolutely. They don’t even have to be family. I really don’t have that much family. I don’t have that much in Butte really. I’ve got my mom and my sister, Sheila and her husband, Paul Cutler and their two boys live in Butte, and my Uncle Bob and his wife and my cousin (name unintelligible) and his daughter and my cousin, Joe and his daughter and that’s really about it. Amazing, but I find myself, the older I’m getting drawn back there. My older sister thinks I’m crazy.

BS: Does she live there?

TS: She lives in (word unintelligible). My sister—Sheila’s a Butte girl. She’s 15 months older than me. She is a Butte girl. My mom is a Butte girl. They could care less if they lived anywhere else. My sister Sheila could care less. She loves it. My sister, Kate, no. She likes Butte and she loves going home, but she thinks it’s almost too much.

BS: Too insular?

TS: Define insular. Insulating?

BS: Yes.

TS: Too smothering? Kind of? Yes. My little sister, Colleen lives in San Francisco. I really don’t know my little sister. She’s five years younger than me and by the time she got to late grade school, I was in high school, college. When she was in college I was...I really amazingly don’t know her that well. I really haven’t been around her. She graduated from Tech then she went to Florida and then Sacramento and now San Francisco and I rarely see her.

BS: But you’re going back to Butte.

TS: I am. There’s no question in my mind. Yes. That’s home. As a matter of fact I find myself at work...Somebody will say, “What’re you doing this weekend, Tom?”

“I’m going home.”

“But you are home.”

“I’m going home.”

BS: Well thank you Tom, so much for that. I appreciate it.
TS: My pleasure.

[End of Interview]