

Maureen and Mike

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Interview with Mr. Ed Radloff of Missoula MT Sept. 1983

ER Ed Radloff

JH Jeffrey L. Halsey

JH We were talking earlier about William Jennings Bryant-Billy Bryant.

ER Bryan.

JH Bryan.

ER Bryan. William Jennings Bryan. When he was in the public eye, known as Billy Bryan. I told you the story about knowing him as a boy, ten-twelve years old. I will add something to it that I forgot to tell you about William Jennings Bryan. He, as I think I told you before, he gave the commencement address at my sister's graduation, High School, in Salem Illinois in the Methodist Church there. In that class that he gave the talk to, the graduation speech, there was a young fellow by the name of Scopes - a senior in High School. One of my sister's classmates. This was a small class of maybe 35 students. It wasn't a big High School. 35 students maybe graduating. In these later years after William Jennings Bryan had been through the political field time and time and time again, it came the Scopes trial in Tennessee. As to whether to teach evolution in schools. William Jennings Bryan was a bit of a religious person. So they brought this trial in Tennessee, the Scopes "Monkey" trial. Monkey meaning evolution. This was a nationally publicized trial. It was just really something. Clarence Darrow, the greatest Criminal lawyer probably in the country, defended Scopes. Scopes was teaching evolution in the classrooms. William Jennings Bryan was on the other side, condemning. Clarence Darrow was an atheist.

JH That I didn't know.

ER He was an atheist. He had to be, probably because he defended some of the most vicious. . . . he was a moneyed man. What I mean is, you didn't get Clarence Darrow as a defense attorney unless you had a lot of money, and he was good. Great big wide suspenders in the courtroom. I saw him one time in Chicago, in a trial of Loeb and Leopold. Murder trial. I was in college at the time in Chicago. There was a Fraternity House that I was living in. It was just a few blocks from the homes of Loeb and Leopold. They lived on the same street. Very wealthy people, very beautiful homes there. Do you know the story?

JH Not in detail.

ER Loeb and Leopold were friends, and they lived on the same street. And they had a quirk that they wanted to commit the perfect crime. They were in college at the time. So they kidnapped a neighbor boy of theirs that lived on the same street. Now what was his name. . . . ?

JH Bobby Franks?

ER Franks, yes. And that little Bobby Franks was about 12 yers old, 12 or 13. (He was 12) And they kidnapped that boy. I don't think they held him for ransom. They were trying to make a perfect crime, to commit a perfect crime. They did write notes on a typewriter. Now what the notes were, maybe it was ransom. I just don't remember now. But that's what caught them up. They took this typewriter after they had written a few notes to the parents of Bobby Franks. Must have been, ransom notes, I just don't remember now. (It was) Then they tossed it (the typewriter) into a lake. And the law found the typewriter, matched the notes with the typewriter type, and traced the typewriter. That's how they caught up with them. Loeb and Leopold's parents hired Clarence Darrow to defend their sons. They were tried together. I was in college at the time. And through hook or crook, I don't know how I got in that courtroom for a couple of hours, and I saw Clarence Darrow in action. A very unpretentious character. But my, what a mind! I have pictures of him that I didn't take, of course, pictures that I had seen and cut out. Great wide suspenders; he always had his coat off in the courtroom, and that was his stance.

JH With his thumbs holding out his suspenders.

ER Yes. That was one of the highlights of my stay in Chicago. To be in that area. That trial had practically world-wide publicity. The court trial was carried in the city newspapers all over the country. Because it involved wealthy people and Clarence Darrow.

JH Otherwise we wouldn't have even known about it?

ER We wouldn't have known too much about it.

JH Was this before or after the scopes trial?

ER This was after the Scopes trial.

JH It's ironic that Scopes went to the same High School where Bryan had the commencement.

ER Yes. And then he was on the prosecution (of Scopes). Even if they had found him guilty or not guilty; I don't think they ever knew [laughter] It was a "test case" is what it was. It was just, should they teach evolution in school or shouldn't they? I don't remember if they found him guilty or not guilty or what, anyhow it was just one of those things, testing something.

JH And Bryan died right after the trial?

ER Right after that. It seems that it was just at the tail end of the trial. I haven't even read anything about this in recent years, this is just as it happened. I lived through it, reading it in the daily newspapers. I think the trial was still on, now I would have to verbify that. But he went to his room to lay down and take a little nap and died. Just went to sleep and didn't wake up. It was so hot down there, it was a hot Tennessee day, sultry.

JH There was no air conditioning at that time?

ER No, not at that time, no. It's funny that the man he gave the graduation speech to was the man he was trying to find guilty or stop teaching evolution. Big world wide trial! [laughter]

JH For a principle.

ER Yes, and my sister was a member of the class! So, I must have known him, but I didn't know it then.

JH I'm just curious; did they have yearbooks for back then at your high school?

ER Oh yes!

JH I was just curious if Scopes's picture would be in that yearbook.

ER Now, somewhere in my archives (which I have scattered all over from the basement to the attic) I have my High School picture, but I can't remember, it might have mentioned William Jennings Bryan. Now, wait a minute, my sister was ahead of me so it would be in her class book, not my class book. How you get tangled up with history, tangled up with it and not realizing what would happen. This Loeb and Leopold were found guilty. Clarence Darrow couldn't prove otherwise with all of his ability. They were sentenced to penitentiary in Illinois. Once in a great while, in the years following (now that was in the times when you were sentenced), you had a sentence, it wasn't for life and you got out in five years. Seems like they were sentenced for life, and that meant life. Until you do die. [laughter] Not a life sentence and get out in five or ten years.

JH Not get out until they bring you out feet first!

ER That's right. Although now Loeb or Leopold, one or the other, was killed in the penitentiary, knifed on a kind of a sex charge or something. (It was Loeb, in 1936) But the other one (Leopold), just not too many years ago was set free. So he did

get a commuted sentence of some sort. But he'd spent a good portion of his life. Well, they were just college boys so you see, now that's only been in the last three or four years that I read where he had been released. And he had just dissappeared into the world. And was living a good life. That's a sad part of a mistake you make whether you're old or young. In a fit of anger and temper and you then suffer the rest of your life for five minutes whether you pull the trigger or use a knife or what. You'd probably never do it again in your life. That Loeb and Leopold case impressed me very much. I guess because I had a chance to see Clarence Darrow in action. [laughter]-Even though it was for only an hour or so.

JH And you already knew Bill Bryan.

ER And then before. I'm mixed up, I don't know if that "Monkey" trial was before or after.

JH The "Monkey" trial was in 1925. That's all I remember. (Leopold and Loeb trial was 1924)

ER It was right in through that time, because I graduated from college in 1925. So it was mixed in there, about the same time. Now is there anything else?

JH I don't know. William Bryan was the most interesting person, unless you knew somebody else that was famous. Or, we talked about Mike Mansfield last time.

ER I think I mentioned that I thought he was one of the smartest politicians that I had ever seen. Or known of. And I had known him, not personally, but I've had dealings with him. Not only with advertising during his campaigns, but also the Toastmaster's Club. I invited him to the Toastmaster's Club, where he gave a talk. That was my extent. You can't be head of the Senate without being a pretty smart guy.

JH And being very personable . . . .

ER Personable and very clever. He was a good politician. Very qualified. He was a Democrat; I've voted both ways, but at that particular time I was inclined to be Republican. [laughs] I still voted for him!

JH He must have been pretty good then!

ER No, I don't believe in . . . . I vote who I think would be the best person to fill the office that I'm voting for. Rather than vote politics. I've known people who would vote for an absolute criminal just if they were on their ticket. They wouldn't change tickets. But, not me. And a lot of people feel the same way. I think over the past years that has become more common. That people vote for the man, not for the party.

JH Yes. I think maybe so.

ER For many years, boy, if you were a Republican, you voted for anything they put up. And if you were a Democrat, you voted for the bad and the good ones no matter what. But now people are voting for who they think is the best.

JH What about us who vote for third party candidates?

ER I have voted for third party candidates. Now, like this last election, what was his party, Clark?

JH Libertarian.

ER Libertarian. I voted that ticket this past election. Knowing that I wasn't going to be a winner. But that doesn't mean anything. I vote where I think it will be the best for the country.

JH Yes, register a protest vote.

ER Yes. If nothing else, it's a protest vote to kind of keep the others in line. To show a li-tie strength that could grow. That would put them on the spot and they would do a little better job think well, this should be done.

JH Did you ever know Lee Metcalf at all, since he was local?

ER I've met him; twice. As a matter of fact, he was in the shop the yarn shop downtown. That's an interesting thing; this yarn shop in 1953 moved downtov?, in a location on East Front Street where the First National Bank windows are, that ticket office in the back, in the alley between the two buildings. That's where our shop was, or my wife's shop at the time. I was with the Missoulian. And I've thought back, of why a little yarn shop (at that time it was small, in the beginnings) and even up through the years would be a kind of a stopping-off place for political candidates. When she had a little shop there, which was a matter of six or seven-hundred square feet, just a little place, the Republican headquarters was east of the shop, about three stores. And the Republicans had their local headquarters there. This must have been . . . . 1958, one of those elections. (It was 1960) But when Nutter and Babcock, Nutter was a candidate, Republican candidate for governor. Babcock was Lt. Governor. Well, in going on around the state, they'd stop at their headquarters in each of the larger cities like Kalispell, Missoula, Billings, even **Ham-**ilton, and Great Falls. When they would come to Missoula duing their campaign drive, they were, of course, over in their headquarters most of the time. Well, pretty soon they got so weary and tired of shaking hands and hearing a lot of political talk pro and con, that they wanted to get away. They drifted over to my wife's yarn shop which was two stores away. And they would sit there and visit when she wasn't busy. He told her, it was so nice to come in here; it's so peaceful and quiet (outside of an occasional

customer) and get away from it all. I happened to come in a time or two when they were in there, and I had a chance to get to talk to them and visit. They were both very likeable people. My wife was Republican. As I say I was always on the fence one way or another. I took a liking to both of them. They were both elected, becoming governor and Lt. Governor. And Nutter (I don't know if you know this or not) after he was in office for a short time (incidentally, we got personal invitations to the inaugural ball. Which we couldn't make!) [laughter] but that was how close we were to them. When he was governor for just a few months, he took a trip in an Army National Guard plane to go someplace and it crashed and killed him. And then Babcock, the Lt. Governor, took the governor's job. Well, this man Nutter, in my estimation, I am so sorry that he couldn't of served that term because, of all the governors that I have seen and voted for, won and lost, he was . . . . the way he started out, he would have made one of the best governors that we ever had. But it was cut short in just a few months with death. And then, after that, we (the yarn shop) moved to . . . . no, while we were downtown, Mansfield came in. And it was the same thing. He got in off the street, away from the people, and he'd sit and visit with my wife. And I would come in once in a while, I caught him there once or twice, just visiting. They would come to town and walk down the streets into the stores and buy a beer for the boys at the bar, pat them on the back. It was good politics, even Mike Mansfield did that. That's the way he got a lot of votes too! Smart business. You were talking about Metcalf. Metcalf was in the shop one time with his wife. His wife bought some yarn. And I visited with him quite a while while she was buying the yarn. That was my only really personal contact with Metcalf, United States Senator. Another one was Max Baucus. Our store then was on Higgins and Main, in the First Federal Savings and Loan Building, on the main floor. Missoula at that time was having a "Crazy Days" sale. Everything was out on the sidewalks, and we had a stand out on the sidewalk. I was outside there with one of the sales ladies selling a lot of stuff out there on the sidewalk. And who comes along but Max Baucus. He took advantage of a lot of people in town (that's before the south side had grown so much) to campaign. I think, as I remember, that he was running for his first term in the House of Representatives. I think he was in the House before he ran for the Senate, (he was) He was meeting thousands of people up and down Higgins Avenue during the "Crazy Days" sale, and he s%ld "can I go in your place and use your washroom?" [laughter] I said sure, so I got the lady out at the table to take care of things, and I took him back in, back in the washroom. He took off his shirt and he washed his face and hands and got all cleaned up and (it was a hot day in July. I think it was.) And then he came out, and we sat at the back table and visited quite a while while he was cooling off and resting. Then he went back on the street again! It s amazing how a little shop like that, at that time seemed to be . . . .

Babcock, after the death of Governor Nutter, came back to town when he was governor a time or two and he stopped in to see my wife, I wasn't there. He stopped in to visit with her. I met him in the bank one day, this was another time. And he still remembered me. He said "Hello there Mr. Yarn Man!" [laughter] Politicians are great with names or connections to where you work. That's part of the business.

JH\_ Maybe they came in, because who'd think of looking for a politician in a yarn shop?

ER In a yarn shop, yes. It was a good little hiding place. And another one, a governor, the "Galloping Swede.'" (Erikson)

JH I'm no good at this, I'm not a native.

ER The Galloping Swede. A Swedish name. Anyhow, he was governor. He stopped in the shop one time for no particular reason. It was just strange that that little spot there would be a stopping-in place for politicians! And the interesting thing was, I was bom and raised in Illinois. I felt quite highly complemented that I have met several governors of the state of Montana. I have met United States Senators from the state of Montana, and I've met high ranking public officials. When I compare with what took place in Illinois, where there were millions of people. The only time you ever saw or heard of the governor was in the paper. And if you did happen to see him, there were a million other people on the street as he drove by in a car. And that's as close as you ever expected to get to one that is important in your state. But here in Montana, you can rub elbows with them.

JH You rubbed elbows with another official, with William Jennings Bryan, because he was Secretary of State under Wilson.

ER And I think four times candidate for President of the U.S. And he was always defeated on his stand for silver and gold issue.

JH "I will not bear a Cross of Gold."

ER A Cross of Gold was the speech he made when he was speaker of the convention, and with his Cross of Gold speech they dropped all the others and nominated him for president.

JH That would have been 1896.

ER Yes. A Cross of Gold. That's all I have on that subject.

JH Nobody else famous at all, that you can think of?

ER As I say it's just been coincidence that I've met some of our so-called famous people. One thing I might say is that the bigger they are, the more common they are. They worked hard to get to where they were, and with few exeptions, they were all mighty fine people in my estimation. I don't care if they were Democrats

or Republicans. Bullmoose or what. One president that I'm sorry that I didn't live during his administration, that is Teddy Roosevelt. He died when I was just a youngster. I didn't know too much about politics. But I can remember, we lived on a farm, we had a mailbox downtown at the post office, which ~~was~~ only a couple of miles away. My dad sent me down after the mail, and I rode a horse down there to get the mail out of the box. I opened it up; I can remember as if it were a couple of years ago. I looked at the paper. My dad was a great Teddy Roosevelt man. I'd heard a lot about him. And it said "Teddy Roosevelt Dies." I can remember that headline. He died in Oyster Bay (NY). That was his home.

JH He was quite a young man too.

ER Compared to the others.

JH Yes, a real shame.

ER He was a knock-down, drag out. He was a kind of type of Harry Truman who wrote his own speeches and didn't write notes on his cuff; he just talked off the cuff! Which people loved and admired. Of course, Harry Truman's previous life was much different than Roosevelts. Roosevelt was born with money. He did the country a lot of good during his lifetime, as I have read afterwards.

JH Yes, they treat him much kinder now than they did at the time.

ER He apparently had a lot of fights with financiers in New York. They had a thing for him. And when you get that gang interested in fighting, you've got problems. He spoke softly and carried his big big stick around. I went to a play down here at the children's theatre here a couple of three years ago. Fellow impersonated Teddy Roosevelt, Did a beautiful job. As I would have thought of Roosevelt, knowing him at twelve years old. Not knowing him, rather, but hearing so much about him. And it was a one-man show, and they did a beautiful job of impersonating Teddy Roosevelt.

JH And it was called "Bully." I've seen the posters.

ER Yes, "Bully!" That was an expression he used. Bully! bully for you!

(End of Tape #1, Side A)

(Tape #1, side B)

JH Miss Dorothy Johnson?

ER Yes.

JH And she's probably the most famous author we have in the state.

ER Yes, she is. I was manager of the Wilma Theatre when we had the premier showing of "A Man Called Horse." And we gave her the red carpet treatment. She was the guest of honor at the premier showing.

JH It was the one and only premier, at the Wilma?

ER Yes. Premier. It was the opening of the show. "A Man Called Horse." We gave her the red carpet treatment. She was off the stage, but was the guest of honor. Did you ever see that picture?

JH Yes, I have.

ER Kind of a brutal picture! [laughter] "The Hanging Tree," the Fox Theatre at that time gave the premier. And we had "A Man Called Horse."

JH How about "Who Shot Liberty Valance?" That's her other famous work that was turned into a movie,

ER I'm not sure where that show was premiered. That was a movie too. I knew Dorothy Johnson when she was at the University. She was the secretary, I believe, for the weekly newspapers. Weekly publishing. And I placed some advertising for the Spinning Wheel through her, to be published in some of her weekly newspapers. Of the association. Those were weekly newspapers for the state of Montana. She was always very unassuming, very personal type of lady. Apparently never married. Whitefish was her home, raised there. As of the moment, I think she's kind of out of circulation. Her health . . . .

JH Her health and her eyesight are very bad. And of course, she likes to walk everywhere. You can still see her walking from the Rattlesnake (canyon area) over the footbridge. I saw her recently.

ER Oh yes? Recently? Good, she was a very nice lady. To me, a very smart author and wrote things that we were interested in. Especially of Montana history. Western history.

JH And they were correct; they weren't romanticized.

ER Just right out of life.

JH I also like the way she does her yard. That's the way I would. Rocks!

ER The best way to have a nice green yard is to put asphalt and then paint it green.

JH Astroturf!

ER You don't have to water it or mow it.

JH We were on the Wilma (theatre) for a bit. I'm asking a really vague, general question. What other exciting things have happened at the Wilma? When you were manager.

ER As entertainment, or as things that have happened with people and the public?

JH Anything. Anything you want to take.

ER This time we'll talk about the shows that we had there. Can't remember what year I went there.

JH I'm going to guess and help. I think you said 1957.

ER It's around that time, I didn't keep a record of it. But those were the days when people went out for the evening, they went out dressed up, cleaned up. Went out to dinner for their anniversary, and maybe took in a show afterwards. Called it a celebration, which it was. Times have changed of course. A short few years afterward (after 1957). But at that time we had some very wonderful entertainment there. Missoula was a stopping place between Minneapolis, Butte, Missoula, Spokane and Seattle. There were artists, there were individual artists like Marion Anderson. There were many single artists, which stopp for a one-night show. We had at that time a "Greater Artists Series", which was five shows during the winter time, all in the winter time. And you bought a ticket for all five concerts. We had the Greco Dance Team. And had some famous violinists. We had stage plays from New York, we had ballets.

JH These things we miss today. At least I certainly miss them.

ER We don't have anything like that today. One of the big shows was "Mary, Mary" which was a kind of a stage play. Out of New York. We filled the house; just packed it. Clear to the top of the balcony. We had Jose Greco, the dance team. He had a whole troupe. Real dancers, not ballet or anything. All kinds

of Classical, even down to Jitterbug. It was very good entertainment. And sometimes a group of 15 to 20 people. Those were the days when people came to that show and had a Loge ticket if you wanted to sit in the rocking chairs. It was really big-time stuff in a small way. And people enjoyed it very much. Our tickets were usually sold out for every concert. I'm trying to think of one of the quite interesting people . . . a black lady that was quite a singer . . .

JH That was Marion Anderson, wasn't it?

ER No, that was another one. She was a church singer at one time . . . (Mahalia Jackson)

JH I'm just guessing. Ethel Waters?

ER No. Neither here nor there. It was quite an interesting concert. She had a voice on her like a foghorn. She's dead now. She insisted on using microphones on the stage, and you could hear her clear to Higgins Avenue without a microphone! We had to turn the microphones way down when she sang. I just can't think of her name now. It was all very interesting to see the transformations. All of a sudden, in a matter of a couple of three years, the ticket sales dropped on these better things, which meant that the new era was taking over. We had some good artists, classical pianists, organists. Audience started getting smaller. So in a matter of a few years, they had to drop it. Because of Rock and Roll, and stuff like that. And these funny bands that they have! [laughter] With long hair and beards! [laughter]

JH My beard won't get that long!

ER When they came out on stage, you'd think somebody had opened the cage door! [laughter] It went to that type of entertainment. Although some things would still draw, like ballet. They always drew good crowds. Little more action, see.

JH We seem to be having a revival of the arts.

ER History repeats itself, if you live long enough. Like I have. What we need today is a little smooth music to calm our nerves. We're living in a very fffcc-eneous time. In the show business, we could have a war picture of some sort. And it reacted on the audience terribly. They would be destructive inside the theatre. They would tear towel racks down, stuff like that. It's the momentum that they get into. They'd bring light bulbs and throw them down from the balcony down on the first floor. I'd just hate to see some of those rough and tumble movies. Like crime pictures. We always had difficulties, and we had to put on extra help to hold the audience down. I contend that the music today, which I listen to, not too long at a time. It has an affect on people. It riles them up. My wife was sick with asthma. I'd come home from work when I was at the theatre, and she'd just be fit to be tied. She'd be reading or

knitting or something and she'd have one of these "wild stations" on. I'd go in there and give her heck for leaving it on so long, and I'd turn it off. In fifteen minutes she'd be calmed down, and we had a nice conversation before we went to bed. And another interesting thing: I'm not a man that follows the stars or I don't follow the zodiacs and all that stuff. But it was interesting in the theatre business. Sometimes it could be a movie, that after I was there for a week or so, I could tell from the lobby by the music and the sounds where the program was. Now one night, you'd have a full house, a good big audience. And there were certain spots in that story that was just real hilarious. And they would just roar and bring the house down. And two nights afterwards, I would walk over to the side door to hear the lighter and the roar, knowing about right where the picture was, and you'd just get a mumble and a grumble. An entirely different audience. And I noticed that throughout all my experiences as a theatre man. Now, what made the difference. It was the same picture, the same jokes, the same situation. But a different audience each time. It might have been two or three days, or a week between times. I've heard a lot about the moon is in the wrong place, and the stars are something, but and it was also carried back to where, one night, you'd be in the lobby, and everyone would come in and be just jolly and happy and said "Good evening, how are you?" And two or three days later, you'd have the same picture probably and they'd come in and be grumpy and wouldn't talk. If it were two or three people.. but when you get a thousand of them!

JH Put you in a bad mood yourself.

ER You just wonder what happened, or what is going on today that makes people so grumpy? And sometimes, just indifferent. So, I guess there must be something to when the moon is in a certain place, or the stars . . . .

JH There's no real explanation.

ER I've never tried to find out, but I've heard a lot about it.

JH Why don't we go ahead and end this, we've talked long enough . . . .

(end of tape)