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Interviewees: Leo D. Dufresne and Theola J. Dufresne
Interviewers: Caitlin DeSilvey and Minie Smith
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Caitlin DeSilvey: This is Caitlin DeSilvey and Minie Smith. It is the 26 of October, 2007. We are doing this interview for the University of Montana archives. So we’re going to begin by asking our interviewees to tell us what is your name and when and where you were born.

Theola Dufresne: My name is Theola Dufresne and I was born in Dickinson, North Dakota on June 1, 1925.

Leo Dufresne: I was born right here in Milltown on September 9th, 1923.

TD: Say your name.

LD: Leo Dufresne.

Minie Smith: Great. How long have you lived in Milltown?

LD: All my life.

TD: I’ve lived here since the first year of ’46—first month of ’46.

MS: And did your family live here before?

LD: Yes.

MS: And when did they come?

LD: Well...

TD: Oh brother.

MS: Or where did they come from?

LD: Well they came from Frenchtown area. I guess mom was born in Frenchtown. My dad was born in Canada. They lived in his folks had a ranch in Nine Mile and my mother lived right in Frenchtown.

CD: And did they move to Milltown for work, before you were born?
LD: Yes. Dad started working at the old Western Mill and then he moved up to the Anaconda Company.

TD: Probably in about 1920.

MS: So before the Western closed he changed?

LD: Yes.

MS: Did you have brothers and sisters?

LD: Yes. I got to think. He had three brothers living here in Milltown and one sister living in Milltown. Sister and a brother living in Six Mile.

CD: This was your father’s family?

LD: Yes.

CD: So your family, you were one of how many children?

LD: There was just one boy and two girls. The two girls live in Missoula and my brother passed away. He was living in Stevensville.

MS: So you lived in Milltown all your life so you haven’t gone away and come back?

LD: Just during the war.

CD: Which house did you say you were born in?

LD: The one on the end. There’s a street.

MS: That’s Laguna, right?

TD: 212 Laguna.

CD: Just two houses down, three houses down?

TD: It would be the third house from here.

CD: So how long did you live in that house? Your whole childhood? When did your family or you leave that one?
LD: I lived there until I went in the service in ’43. I was born right there in the house.

MS: And did you work at the mill?

LD: I worked for Anaconda and then Champion and then I went to work for the Bonner School.

MS: What did you do for Anaconda? What were your jobs there?

LD: At Anaconda, I worked on the dry chain.

MS: Is that different from the green chain?

LD: Yes, it’s lumber that comes out of the dry kiln. You sort it. And then I went to work for another fellow started the “lam” plant, making laminated beams for Anaconda.

MS: Was that in the ‘60s that they did that? No, it would be before that.

TD: No, I’d say about the ‘60s, something like that. It’s hard to remember all those things.

MS: Was that Champion that made the laminated beams?

LD: Yes.

MS: Yes, so that would have been in the ‘60s.

LD: When I worked for Anaconda I was working on the dry chain and loading cars of lumber in cars.

CD: So Theola, did you work at the mill or do anything? (unintelligible) handful of jobs for women, didn’t they, at some point?

TD: No, I don’t do nothing. (laughs) I worked at the Western Montana Bank until after he came home from the service and then I stayed home and worked at home.

CD: So tell us a little bit about how you met, maybe, and when you came to live here?

TD: We met in high school. Then we got married December 22, 1945, when he came home from New York, wasn’t it? And then he was supposed to go back and be discharged, but he didn’t come back for three months and we didn’t know where he was at! (laughs)

LD: I got back and they needed water tenders for escorting U.S.S. Helena to England, so they shanghaied me onto the destroyer. When she heard from me, it was from England.
CD: Oh goodness.

TD: We didn’t get mail until just before he came home. We were all frantic. We didn’t know what to do. But I was glad we didn’t have all this news coverage and TV and stuff during those times because it would have been harder.

CD: So you grew up where? You went to the same high school so you were both at Missoula County High School.

TD: We moved to Great Falls in 1936, I think it was. And then we moved over here to Missoula in ’40 or ’41. Anyway, that’s where we met was in high school.

MS: And do you have children?

TD: Yes, we have three boys: Larry, Jerry, and Duwayne. They all live real close by us.

MS: In Milltown?

TD: Two in Milltown and one in Piltzville.

CD: Did any of them end up working at the mills? Did you have three generations that...?

TD: Larry did, didn’t he, for a while in high school? Maybe not.

LD: I don’t think so.

TD: Oh dear. (laughs)

CD: No career (unintelligible) mill.

MS: So from your perspective, what’s the biggest change you’ve seen here in the last fifty years, or seventy years?

TD: The biggest change is this that’s going on right now. They moved our beautiful river. We had such a beautiful spot back here—fishing, boating, every kind of recreation you would want. And it’s all been removed.

MS: Because the river level was...?

TD: Because of the dam.

MS: Right, but the river level had dropped so much from the dam, yes.
CD: What is your understanding of what will be left there when they’re done? How high will it be?

TD: Not much, very little. You can go stand on the bridge now and look down and you can see the bottom of the river, so it’s not going to be the same.

LD: There used to be thirty-some feet of water right by the old bridge and now I don’t know if there’s twelve feet.

CD: Did you have a dock down there?

TD: Mmm hmm, yes. Oh we had a real beautiful area down there. And the sunsets, you know, the sun comes through the valley and to the bridge and it had the most beautiful reflection in the river. It was gorgeous.

CD: So was that a pretty important part of your day-to-day life?

TD: That’s right.

CD: So maybe just talk a little bit about the kinds of things you used to do in the river or around there?

TD: Fish, swim...kayak.

LD: Fish and swim and ice skate. We used to get good ice years ago and us kids were on the river all the time. Then we duck hunted up the river.

TD: The boys would always, during Christmas vacation, they’d go ice skating. They’d live in their skates all day. Come in the house with them, want to eat even.

CD: It must have been a pretty special childhood to have that right out your back door, goodness.

TD: Oh we did. We’d go make fox and goose rings, remember? The kids would get their skates on and they’d play. We had a good time.

LD: University kids used to come out and build a rink and play hockey back here too.

CD: Right down below your place there? So that was the prime ice ground there?

TD: Mmm hmm.
CD: So was the life that your boys had playing on the river, was it pretty similar to the way you had been as a kid?

TD: Definitely.

MS: Did you tend to use this water rather than go to the reservoir behind the dam, or did you go all over?

TD: Oh we would go all over. That was a beautiful wetlands up there. In fact, we had one party come and interview us and when he moved to town he had been asked if he’d like to go see the Milltown...

LD: Cesspool.

TD: Cesspool. He said, “It’s beautiful.”

I said, “Yes.”

We have eaten fish, the ducks, the kids have gotten crawdads. They’ve eaten everything out of that river and none of us have ever been sick. There hasn’t been any problem whatsoever.

MS: Did you know of or hear of Riverside Park? It used to be down by the dam.

TD: Oh sure.

LD: Yes, it wasn’t much, I mean it was just an area that people used to go camp there once in a while. They’ve got the Griles Trailer Courts in there now.

MS: OK, so that’s where it is.

TD: His sister, he took his sister down there and she learned to drive down there. (laughs) He got out of the car though and let her drive.

LD: It was just a little dirt road that wandered in.

TD: There wasn’t much to it.

LD: I’d sit in the tree and let her drive around.

MS: So when did it disappear? When the trailer court came in?

TD: Actually, you know that part that’s dug out? Didn’t that used to be part of it? Remember when they dug out all that above the dam?
LD: Well they dug that out for Grile.

TD: No, no.

LD: You mean where the company filled...?

TD: Yes.

LD: They took the ashes and stuff out of the burner and dumped it down there and filled that all in.

MS: Ah, was that Champion that did that?

LD: Yes.

CD: Just kind of curious when you realized what was going on with the reservoir and the contamination there? Was that something that you might have known about before 1981, when they had their big discovery?

LD: The houses over near the Clark’s Fork, when they’d water it would turn the houses yellow on the outside.

CD: Oh ok, from the well water?

LD: That was from the surface water.

TD: But it was just all on that side of the highway. We’ve had wonderful...We’ve never had a problem with our water.

CD: Oh because you’re drinking Blackfoot water.

TD: Our water’s wonderful.

CD: And you’ve still got fine water? Never had any problems?

TD: Oh wonderful. Except they’re going to put the pipes and stuff down farther because they’re worried about us not having water or what there will be when they let more water (unintelligible).

CD: So as far as your neighbors over there, though, was it sort of always understood the water was a little funny, maybe?
TD: Oh definitely, on the other side of the railroad tracks.

CD: Was that something people were worried about?

TD: They didn’t seem to. We just took it as a part of life, I guess, is all I can say they did.

CD: So you have quite the perspective on the last twenty years of trying to make a decision about what to do and all that. What do you think about what’s happening now and how it’s all shaking out?

TD: We’re not very happy about it because it’s just...First of all, it was supposed to be the way Lewis and Clark, you know, they were going to...Well it’s not close to what Lewis and Clark...

CD: The look of the restored river, that’s what they said?

TD: They’re changing everything, yes. They’ve got a lot of work, but it’s all for money and actually the water down in Missoula, the river is worse than the contamination here.

CD: Just in the river?

LD: Right. Up the Blackfoot side.

TD: The first meeting I went to, they stated that the contamination right at the dam, the water, the levels weren’t as high—but as you went farther and farther towards Butte and Anaconda is where the big problem was. And there’s sediments there, sure, I’ll agree with that, but it hasn’t affected us in any way.

MS: Were you affected when the interstate went in? Did that change Milltown at all?

TD: Yes, this house right here used to be over where the interstate is.

MS: This one next to us?

TD: And then there’s two houses down on, I think it’s called Juniper Drive—the road that goes to the dam. There’s two houses that are up high and they’re quite similar, two white houses. They were removed from over there. Then we tried to tell them about that the interstate was built over a dump. They said, “Oh we know about Baller’s Dump.”

I said, “No.”

This other fellow spoke up, and he says, “No, we had our own dump.” They wouldn’t believe us.

He says, “I know because I took garbage over there all the time.”
LD: And company mills...[phone rings]

MS: So we were talking about the change with the interstate coming in.

TD: That didn’t really affect us that much. It was more the houses that were removed. Most of them were able to buy them back or somehow, I don’t know how all the arrangements were.

MS: So do you actually own the land under...?

TD: Yes we do.

MS: And have you done that from the beginning?

TD: No, it happened just before all this other stuff...

LD: Two or three years ago.

TD: Oh we were grateful for that.

MS: Because most of the land, the houses in Milltown, belonged to the mill.

TD: Yes, and we paid yearly rent, which was cheap.

MS: So what would a yearly rent...?

TD: Well it started out at $20. And what were we paying at the last? I think maybe $70. Couldn’t do anything better than that. But we did. They were very generous with us with the land and we had a good deal.

MS: Have most people bought the land underneath?

TD: Oh yes. We all did. We had a big group. Well we had a meeting of course. You always have to have these meetings. (laughs) And they had two or three people in charge and they were the ones that went through all the organization of getting it done legally and everything.

CD: So Leo, when you were a child, can you just describe what the street would have looked like and how it’s different today?

LD: It’s not much different.

TD: The new house across the street is way different.
CD: What about the way people kept their houses up or that kind of thing? Has it changed much?

TD: Yes, well like the house next to Duwayne’s, he’s remodeled that house. There used to be a house in front of that one but then they moved in this trailer house and took the other one down. It had caught fire and different things so they took it down. But basically—and the house on the corner was remodeled. Well, you have to after all these years.

LD: Well that one at one time was a service station, the one on the corner.

CD: Oh, because the highway was...

LD: Had a gas pump. But that was the main highway then.

TD: Then we had the big field where the workers could have wood dropped off and then they’d come and get it up and chop it up for their winter use. So there would be piles of wood all over and all the children would go over here and play and they’d build forts out of the people’s wood. People would come out and they’d go, “What happened?”

MS: Where was the field?

TD: Right past the fence, towards the mill.

LD: Where the log yard is now.

CD: We have a photograph.

TD: They’d get out there and play cowboys and Indians, hide and go seek...

MS: That was Anaconda that provided the wood? Did Champion do that?

TD: Yes, Champion did too for a while, until they put gas in, which would have been in the early ’60s.

LD: Most everybody burned wood before the gas came in.

CD: We have some aerial photographs here, but I don’t know that that one actually captures what you’re talking about there.

MS: Did the mill do other things for you? Did they give you things at Christmas or did they do...?
LD: They, for a long time, gave turkeys out for Christmas. Then that’s when the Anaconda was there. Then Champion, the ones that worked there, they gave us either a package of cigarettes or a cigar for Christmas. (laughs)

CD: One cigar.

MS: Did you use the company store for your groceries or did you use the store...?

LD: We didn’t. They had one up there but Oscar Hemgrin(?) had a store here and we used to...

TD: And see it opened up onto Highway 10. Well then when Disbros(?) got it they opened it up to face Highway 200. And now that Bobby Shawn(?) has it—well then it got changed somewhere along the line so that it’s facing south. So it’s had three different entrances. (laughs) But it was a very nice store, a handy store.

MS: So you could get everything you needed in Milltown.

TD: We did most of our shopping in town when we would go, but we didn’t go that often. But we always patronized them, to a point.

CD: So when you were a child, did you speak French in your family?

LD: I never did. My older brother did quite a bit, but I could understand a lot of it but I wasn’t one for speaking much anyway. (laughs)

CD: Were there a lot of families from different places around you, then?

TD: Mmm hmm.

CD: Even when you moved in, what was it like?

TD: OK, the one house they were Finlander. What were Johnsons? I don’t know—they would have been Swedes or Norwegians? And Kyles, I don’t know what they were. And Dussaults, of course, were French. And then she was Finlander and he was Swede. What Bushes were, I don’t remember. And Elma (unintelligible), what they were. I mean, the others, I’m not sure.

LD: They were Finns, too.

TD: Were they Finns too? OK. So it was kind of a mixture here. But all nice people.

LD: They had, where this plumbing outfit, or heading outfit, is now was a big pool hall and they had a dance floor on top and they called it The French. Harold’s Club was a Finlander’s. They had their own bars.
MS: So The French was this one here?

CD: Was that a place you’d go as a child or young man often?

TD: Well by then it was kind of gone, wasn’t it?

LD: It burned by the time I got old enough to go to the bars or anything.

TD: Then there was the Midway Bar, right behind the store, across from the store, used to be the Midway Bar. Then the post office used to be in the big double story house. That belongs to one of our sons now. So everything was handy. It was real...

MS: So you walked to everything.

TD: Yes, mmm hmm.

MS: Did you have a car early on or did you...?

TD: Not right away. Our first car was a ’35 Dodge. Of course, all the big trucks and that, they’d screech their brakes because only one could go across the bridge at a time. So our highway was right here and actually everything worked out fine. Of course there weren’t as many cars as there are now.

MS: Let’s see, has the sense of community changed over time? It sounds like when you were growing up...

TD: We knew everybody here.

LD: Now we know nobody.

TD: Oh we do, we know some, but not as many, and of course once your children grow and get out of school, you lose contact with the new people that come in.

CD: Are there a lot of younger families living in this area now? How would you describe who the remainders are?

TD: There’s actually only one—no there’s two young families, three. Tony and the ones across that just had a baby and then the trailer and the people in back. They’re all youngsters. We’re the old ones here. (laughs)

CD: Do you have any of your friends still here in the area?
TD: Well, we have Ellen and Vick. Actually, so many have gone. They’ve passed on. Our best friends have all passed on, and our families. So we just have our regular family now, our own family.

MS: Were you involved in other community activities in the 40s and 50s, like with churches or...?

TD: Mostly with the school, you know, PTA and baseball and softball. And what else? Not much. Hunting and fishing. (laughs)

CD: Were your boys Boy Scouts?

TD: Pardon?

CD: Did they do Boy Scouts?

TD: Oh Boy Scouts, oh definitely, yes, I forgot the Boy Scouts. In fact, Ilona and I, they had birthday calendars for the school this one year. Well they kept on having it for a while. And of course we got on the committee that we had to go and ask for donations. Well then when we’d go ask for donations for Scouts or baseball, well they got to know us pretty well to where when we’d just go in shopping they’d say, “Now what do you want?” (laughs)

MS: So we’ve talked a little about—we’re kind of skipping around here—about the dam and the power house, but do you have specific memories of that area, the dam and...?

LD: Us kids practically lived, we fished by the dam all the time. And then we used to be able to go through and they had a swinging bridge to walk across. And that little lake, we called it, on the other side of the old Milwaukee track, used to warm up early in the spring and we’d go over there swimming all the time. That was our swimming hole.

TD: See that’s now filled with contaminated soil that they took out a few years ago.

LD: About half of it they took soil from the dam and dumped it in there.

TD: They lined it with plastic, that black plastic, first. But they took away that nice swimming hole.

MS: Did your boys used to go down there too?

TD: Oh sure, oh my yes.

LD: That tunnel’s got all our names carved in the cement. (laughs)
CD: Does it? OK, so you and your children used it? That would actually be a neat thing to go find.

TD: Oh yes, there’s names from all the different ones from out here, unless they’ve covered them over.

LD: They painted a lot of graffiti in there now. They’ve got it all sprayed.

CD: When’s the last time you went down there to that area?

TD: Oh, it’s been ages for me. It’s been a long time.

LD: It’s only been three or four years ago since I was there. I got a boat down here and I used to go over there quite often. It hasn’t been too many years since I was over there.

CD: So you’d go over and fish right in the reservoir there. What kinds of fish would you catch and would you eat them?

LD: Mainly northern pike and we liked them better than trout and it got so I never even caught trout anymore. I’d just go after the pike.

TD: That was in the later years.

CD: How do you prepare a pike? What’s the best way to eat it.

LD: Well I’ll tell you what, you skin them and you fillet them and get the bones all out and then I deep fat fry them or just pan fry them. It’s very good. They’re not fishy. They’re white, delicate meat. They aren’t a pretty fish, but boy they’re sure good eating. (laughs)

CD: Would you catch them right out here in the Blackfoot as well?

TD: We have, in the later years. It used to be they weren’t in here, but they’ve worked their way down from all the way up above. We’d catch them at different lakes and things too.

MS: I suppose with the dam out that you might get some fish coming up that couldn’t come up before. That’s possible.

TD: Well, I don’t know. But most of them come from up above, from the Blackfoot, down the drainage.

LD: The white fish and bull trout and cutthroat and them all moved on up. Now the white fish used...In the fall, when they were spawning, they’d come up against the dam and everybody’d
go down there and catch whitefish because they’d be all up against the dam. But they’ll be moving on up the river now.

CD: Did you ever have problems with flooding, living so close?

TD: No.

LD: Since we’ve been here, years ago they had a pretty good flood that there was some old buildings down closer to the water and it washed them out.

TD: That’s been years ago.

LD: But just last night they talked about that ice jam that come down to the Milltown Dam. It never got past Bonner. It never got here at all. But on TV, it said it come down and they thought it was going to wash out the dam. Well, it never come close to the dam.

MS: That was in ’96, or –ish, yes.

TD: In fact, the ice went clear up to the highway. I mean, it just bubbled up and went clear to the highway. I mean, it was unbelievable.

LD: Above Bonner.

TD: It didn’t even bother the dam at the mill. See the mill always had a little dam up there. And it didn’t even get that far. We were standing up here, because we’re up above the river quite a ways, and we were standing here waiting to watch it come. Sheriff’s department over across the way with their bullhorn—“Get down there! Get out of there! You’re going to get hit by the ice!” They kept yelling at us.

Finally, my one son yelled, “You’ll get it before we do.” We thought they’d come and say something to us personally, but they never did. But no way could we be touched by it.

CD: And was there any other year where you remember the ice doing that? That was really kind of a freak thing, wasn’t it?

TD: That was really...

MS: It backed up about five miles up. There’s a bridge, right?

TD: No, it came down just above, well, just on the curve from Bonner.

LD: Just south of Bonner, by that big cliff. And it stopped right there.
TD: See, they used to have in the river—let’s see, what were they called? They were kind of...They had sides so that when the logs would come down they wouldn’t jam, they’d break up.

LD: Break up the log jams.

TD: I think those kind of stopped the ice too. But anyway, it just went up through to the highway. People were out there walking all over it. I didn’t. (laughs)

CD: That’s a little scary, yes.

TD: Oooh, yes.

MS: When did they take the logs out of the river? When did they stop doing the log drives?

LD: When the Western closed down. They used to...Well, they had pilings and a spur on the other side of the river and they used to dump logs right across the river and run them down to the mill.

MS: So you said your father switched from the Western to Anaconda. Did he not like working for the Western?

TD: They just closed it up.

LD: When it closed down, he moved.

MS: OK, yes.

TD: We have the picture—well, our son has it now—of the Western. It’s one of those great big long ones. In fact, Jack Demmings had it out at the university. We finally got it back from him because we wanted that, the boys did. Beautiful picture.

MS: I wonder if it would be possible to get a picture of the picture.

LD: Oh I’m sure. I wonder, when they had the fire up around Sealy, my son’s got a cabin on Inez and he brought the picture home because he’s got it up there, but I don’t know if he...

TD: He could have taken it back up again, I don’t know. We’d have to find out. I could probably have him take a picture of it.

MS: That would be wonderful. There are fewer pictures of the Western than there are of the...[phone rings]

CD: So what do you think this area will be like in fifty years if you imagine ahead?
TD: It’s kind of scary, because you don’t know what’s going to go on with all this open space. Oh and there’s always more housing and more housing. We’ve had, you might say, almost like a private life out here. I used to complain because the county wouldn’t do anything for us in the wintertime—plowing and things like that. But you know, now, when I look back, I’m grateful they didn’t because it was sure peaceful compared to now. It’s just different.

MS: Do you think the mill will survive?

TD: I have no idea.

MS: It keeps getting cut back.

LD: Yes, I doubt it because every year it’s going to get worse and worse.

TD: It’s been going down hill quite steadily, yes. We just don’t know.

CD: The housing that’s proposed would actually be right at the end of your street, is that right?

TD: No, I don’t know. I had understood that he was going to move the houses that are right up in Bonner on the left hand side, that they were going to be put, I thought, behind the houses that are on the...

MS: Behind the school?

TD: Behind the school, yes. Because there used to be houses up in there.

CD: So nothing on this side of the road is proposed yet...?

MS: I don’t think so.

TD: No, the log yard is empty. That hasn’t been disputed yet. I don’t know what they’re going to do.

LD: There have been rumors that the railroad wanted to put some substation or something in there.

TD: In a spur. And then this other fellow, this Cooney, wants to...He’s talking about maybe getting—oh I don’t know—but he’s got big ideas. Then he bought that across the river. And then last night one party said, well, he had heard they were going to move the houses from Bonner over there. Well that...They might not make it. (laughs)

MS: This is the piece of land that Stimson used for a log yard across the river—just for the tape.
TD: Well actually, it’s up on the mountain, part of the mountain, because it’s right behind the...

LD: It’s not...Well, I don’t know. (unintelligible) mountain it’s just flat.

TD: Well we don’t know for sure.

LD: Between the river and West Riverside, it’s where there was their log yard. They don’t use it anymore. I don’t know what they’re going to do with that.

TD: We just don’t know what’s going to be.

CD: There’s an awful lot of uncertainty to live with, isn’t there?

TD: Yes, I quit going to meetings because it’s too frustrating and I know there’s some people that keep encouraging, “Come on, come on, you’ve got to keep coming,” even from the Fish and Game and places like that. But I don’t know. It’s too irritating. It’s just like all of a sudden everybody wants to tell us what to do, they’re going to improve our lifestyle. We don’t know how. I mean, as far as we’re concerned, it’s gone the other way.

CD: Yes, they keep telling you it’s an opportunity for great things to happen, but...

TD: Yes, but what...? (laughs) I think the most disturbing part for a lot of us out here is so many people don’t really know where Milltown is. They think everything’s Bonner out here. And there is a distinction. And it even says ‘Milltown.’

MS: So how would you describe the difference between...?

TD: Well Milltown is right here in this vicinity. Bonner is up past the school. And of course the person starting the Bonner...Everything’s built on Bonner. But everything right here is Milltown.

CD: And it’s a pretty distinct little place.

TD: But yet they say the townfolks in Bonner on the radio and TV.

CD: So was there a special on TV last night that was talking about...?

TD: No, but it was just on the news. What’s his name?

LD: What’s his first name?

CD: Oh it’s not that important, I guess, for the tape. Here I am going off.
TD: It was on the news. We sit here: “Liar, liar!” (laughs)

CD: So what do you think the area down at the confluence will be like? What would you like to see there?

TD: Well you know, we go up on the tunnel and look down and it’s amazing what they have done, but I could care less. My home’s right up here. But it’s different.

CD: Yes—would you have liked to see them keep the power house there?

TD: Yes.

CD: What do you think should have happened with it?

TD: You know, there were so many false stories about the dam itself. It is old, but it was doing fine. And they talk about the crack in the dam. That is where a walkway used to be.

LD: They always show where the cement’s broke. It’s an old walkway that used to go out to the island. It has nothing to do with the dam. But they show that all the time, how it’s cracked. (laughs)

TD: There used to be an island below the dam and it had trees on it. The guys would get over there, fishing, but then in time it’s been washed away.

CD: Oh so that pier thing runs out between, below the power house and the spillway—that’s the bit that was actually a little walkway to the island?

TD: Mmm hmm.

CD: Oh wow, I didn’t realize that. I don’t think I’ve ever seen a photo that shows that.

LD: There used to be a little wooden bridge from the mainland out to that island too. You can see the pilings out there where the wooden bridge went.

CD: When did that get washed away?

LD: Oh it’s been quite a few years since that washed away.

TD: I have no idea what happened to it.

LD: Well when they made that new spillway, it washed it out.

TD: They always had lovely homes down there for the workers, beautiful homes.
LD: Right where the park is.

CD: Were you friends with anyone who worked down there or lived in those houses?

TD: Oh yes, there was...

LD: Hathaway.

TD: Well that was way back, yes, Hathaways. And then...

LD: Audrey’s dad worked down there.

TD: What’s Bob’s last name...Hand, oh Bob Hand’s dad. That family, they lived down there. Bob Hand. He lives over on the West Riverside somewhere. And his folks lived down there. He did too. He was brought up down there. At the meetings we tried to tell him that crack was what it was from but they wouldn’t listen to us.

CD: So Bob Hand is in West Riverside. We actually haven’t talked to anybody who lived in that housing development.

TD: Oh yes, they lived right down there.

CD: And was he your age? When you were growing up he was there?

TD: No, he’s younger, but not much...How old would Bob...? I don’t know.

LD: Bob’s younger.

TD: Well he’d be in his ‘60s, I’m sure.

MS: So he worked for Montana Power?

TD: His dad did.

CD: Did you know Emmett Smith and his family?

TD: Oh Emmett Smith, yes.

CD: We talked to him.

TD: Did you? Yes, he’s a nice guy.
CD: So was that area there—the parklike area above the reservoir—was that an area you used to go for picnics or anything like that?

TD: No, not then. It was more before you get to the dam, where the trailer court’s at now.

CD: Oh OK, that was where you would go.

TD: We could go down to the dam, though, anytime, go through it if we wanted to. And then there was quite a driveway down and then they’d park and they’d fish right down below by the dam.

CD: They’re trying to save pieces of the power house. What do you think should happen with that, or is that...?

TD: *I could care less.* *(laughs)* It doesn’t matter. They all have these big expectations at the meetings that all these—oh, they’re just going to have tourists come from all over to see all this and that. Well, we’ll see. I don’t know. *(laughs)* We just don’t bother anymore. We just had to let go and what’s going to happen is going to happen.

CD: It’s happening pretty fast now, though, isn’t it?

TD: Yes.

CD: How has it affected just your day to day life having all the work going on there?

TD: Oh we hear them in the mornings before we get up.

CD: What time do they start banging?

TD: Oh around eight. Depends on the weather.

MS: We stood on the bridge because we were a little early and thought that must be an amazing noise to listen to all day.

TD: We had one family down here that had had quite a struggle because they wanted to take their—well, they have to take their garage down and all this to fix this extra bridge while they do work on the A-200. It’s been a runaround for them. But they finally...The guy says, “Oh you can sign the papers.”

He said, “*Nope, I’m not signing any papers until I get the contract that they have promised me for my new garage when they’re through.*” Because they’re cutting right through their yard.
CD: Is there anybody who is excited about having all this extra yard running down to the river that you know of, or is everybody...? Because we noticed that somebody had cleared their patch already.

TD: We had thought of it, but boy those weeds are tough and we figure by keeping those it will keep people out because it’s hard to walk through. Because we have had some that have come through. My son down there has had trouble with some. Kids come up and they come from across the river. In fact, we were sitting here eating supper and two guys go down the street. I thought, “Their pants are wet.” And so Duwayne got up and he ran home and here they had come through his yard, up the river bank, through his yard, drug their boat up.

CD: Oh goodness.

TD: (unintelligible) to go get their car.

CD: And where is your son’s house?

TD: The end house.

CD: This is the house you were actually born in, your son lives in it now. Oh, okay.

TD: And he told them, he said, “You know, you had no business. This is private property.”

They said, “Well we had...”

He said, “There’s a boat launch and you couldn’t help but see it across the river.”

But see, their car must have been parked up here somewhere. They said, “It won’t happen again.”

He said, “It better not, because this is private property.”

CD: So when the river was higher you never had problems with that.

TD: No.

CD: Because it was more enclosed, wasn’t it?

MS: I just wanted to ask one more quick question about when the mill changed from Anaconda to Champion, was there a difference? Was that a smooth transition?

LD: It was pretty smooth, yes.
MS: Did everybody get hired?

LD: Yes.

TD: They just carried on from what it was.

LD: In fact, when Champion took over, they hired...because they didn’t want more they started laminating beams and plywood and this and that and so they hired a lot more people.

CD: I think that’s pretty much the questions we had. If there’s anything else you want to share for posterity.

TD: I can’t think of anything offhand. (laughs) Oh, we have had every kind of animal, practically, around here—beavers, muskrats. In fact, beavers, we had to put wire around our trees and things, even up here on the bank, because they were coming up after them. Across the way, there used to be a lot of trees but they’ve taken them all down. Except that one poor tree. Why they never bothered it...Of course there’s nothing left to it. Can’t call it a tree, I don’t think.

CD: Would you ever get bears or anything coming down along the river bank?

TD: Yes, bears; we had moose in my son’s yard; deer used to come up in the wintertime and come up in the driveway.

LD: They’d come across the ice and then come over to eat in the brush on the edge of the river and you’d see a lot of deer.

TD: And Leo rescued dogs from the ice. Dogs would fall in and so he always had his boat handy with a rope on it and they’d go out. Sometimes they used just ladders and sleds to go out and rescue the dogs. We had one dog that he rescued and brought in the house and got him sponged off and dried off and turned him loose. He went right back out there again. So then Leo brought him back in and we kept him in again for a while. He took him down. He was trying to go across the...so he took him down to the bridge so he could go across the bridge.

CD: Did you ever have a kid go through the ice when you were skating?

LD: Yes, I pulled a few out. In fact, I went in a few times under the train bridge, the old coal burning engines used to jump their clinkers when they went across, so that ice wasn’t froze as solid. We’d go like heck and your foot would go through and then you’d dive in. We used to get wet every once in a while.

TD: The kids, when they’d ice skate back here, of course we’d have big bonfires. They had a wonderful time. But all these animals and things, we’ve just had everything around here. In fact, we’ve had a family of beavers up the river there all summer. But they’re building their
house I guess farther and farther out into the water. I think they know what’s going to happen.
(laughs)

CD: Right, they’re planning.

TD: They had a little family and everything. I can’t think of anything else.

CD: The skating talk made me think, when did it stop icing over so that you could really skate on it? Have you had good skating years recently, or fewer?

LD: The last few years it hasn’t been the weather that we used to get. Weeks with cold weather and no snow and it was just like glass back there. But in the last few years it hasn’t...It snows and rains and then freezes.

TD: Then stuff from the mill. It just isn’t any good.

CD: How did that affect you when the Stimson dam went out? Did that change anything?

TD: No, it didn’t change anything.

LD: It didn’t change that much.

TD: That was sturdy little dam. They had trouble getting it out. (laughs) Everybody from Bonner—well not everybody, but most of the kids that wanted to ice skate. They always would call us to see how thick the ice was, if it was safe yet. Otherwise they wouldn’t let their kids come down until Leo said it was okay. (laughs) And even this Charlie Hamma that was just interviewed in the Missoulian the other day, he used to call us from town and he was an ice skater. Oh, that man would skate all the way up the Clark’s Fork. He was good. But he’d have to call and check.

LD: The ice on the Clark’s Fork never...That water’s warmer and it never used to freeze like this back here. And we’d skate up there and you could see you had to keep moving or you’d go through.

MS: So you called that the Clark Fork even when you were little?

LD: It used to be Hellgate. We called it the Hellgate when we were kids. Everybody called it the Hellgate. It changed to Clark’s Fork.

TD: In fact, in the wintertime, before the interstate was there, the trail—well, they called it the Lewis and Clark trail—and the kids would slide down that hill onto the ice.

MS: Was that McCormick Hill?
TD: McCormick Hill.

CD: And that was the name for it was the Lewis and Clark?

TD: Well that’s what they used to say that that was the Lewis and Clark trail.

CD: That’s interesting. That’s just what you called it locally, right?

TD: It’s probably where they...

TD: The kids would start out here on the street, go down through our yard, down the bank, and go clear down under the bridges on their sleds.

LD: Actually it was the Mullan Trail.

TD: The Mullan Trail, that’s it.

LD: That statue that’s across the river of Mullan was over where the freeway was at. That’s the original spot.

CD: OK, so he would stand up there above the sledding hill there and watch over you.

TD: (laughs) He was watching (unintelligible). Yes, I misquoted there, I’m sorry.

CD: Oh that’s OK. I was just kind of curious what people called it.

TD: And now that you mention it, you know, you forget all these little things sometimes.

CD: This is wonderful.

MS: Well thank you very much for taking time to talk with us and talk with the tape.

TD: Well I hope it will be helpful. I don’t know if it will or not.

CD: Yes, I think it definitely will.

TD: But we enjoy our life out here.

MS: That’s great.

TD: We don’t have the fog that Missoula has. We have sunshine. We have wind, a lot of wind, but we have nice, beautiful sunshine.
[END INTERVIEW]