

Oral History Number: 098-017, 018
Interviewee: Perdita Duncan
Interviewer: Mary Murphy
Date of Interview: March 18, 1980
Project: Butte Oral History Collection

Perdita Duncan: She had gone to visit an aunt in Philadelphia. The aunt wanted her to marry a man of means in Philadelphia and my mother didn't care for him at all. She'd seen an ad in the paper that a woman wanted a traveling companion. It happened that the woman, whose husband was a wealthy owner of a coal industry there...I forget the name of the town. They were coming here to visit relatives in Butte. I think, they lived in Walkerville.

So one day when my aunt happened to...left home to go downtown to attend to some business, my mother told her uncle that she did not want to marry this man, and she wanted to get away from my aunt. He conspired with her to get her trunk down to the railroad station. My mother went to see this woman about the position of traveling companion. They took an instant liking to each other. She said, "Well, we're going out to Butte, Montana." That's how my mother happened to arrive in Butte in 1905.

Mary Murphy: How old was she when she left?

PD: Twenty.

MM: What did her parents think about this marriage? Did they...?

PD: My mother's father was dead. He had been killed in a train accident. I never heard how my grandmother thought about it. She was quite agreeable to Mom having gone to Philadelphia to Aunt Annie. My Aunt Annie and Aunt Elizabeth had both accumulated what was considered money in those days, when a dollar bought almost five dollars' worth of goods. If you had 100 dollars, what was that? Five hundred?

Anyway, one aunt went into a tailoring business, and they made quite a bit of money—she and her husband. My Aunt Annie's husband had bought property in Philadelphia when it was not worth...didn't cost much and subsequently became worth a lot, but that was all disposed of.

I think that my grandmother was quite willing for Mom to go up there, but she had no idea Mom would end up as far west as Butte. Having come to Butte and met this...her employer's family...the employer's relatives took an immediate liking to Mom and embraced her almost as a daughter. My mother, according to what she says, happened to have seen my father on the street. She didn't know who he was, but she said to the woman to whom she was a traveling companion: "I am going to marry that man."

When finally Mom met him, he was engaged to another woman, but there was a tragic accident on the streetcar going out to Columbia Gardens. A number of people were killed. My father was in the accident. His fiancé was killed. My father was injured, but not so severely that he didn't recover. Mom met him about 1906. By 1907, I think they were married and settled.

Having seen my father and decided she was going to marry him, the woman with whom she was traveling went on to San Francisco, and they were involved in that big earthquake. Mom always said that was part of her fate not to have been there at the time. Anyway, she came here in 1905 and married and settled down and never went back except to visit.

MM: When the woman that she was working for went on to San Francisco, what kind of work did your mother find here?

PD: Mom waited tables at a place called...It's here on Broadway, I think, in the vicinity of Harrington's Café. At that time, so many of the men that were here that were involved in the development of the Anaconda Copper Mining Company (wasn't called that then) ate there. Many a big deal was discussed in Mom's presence. They would say, "Now that young lady is listening." And they would say, "Well we know her. She's not going to ever say a word about what's going on." I wish I could remember that place!

She waited on tables. That was all new to Mom. She'd never done it. Many things she did prior to having gotten married were things that she just taught herself to do because she wasn't brought up to do that. My mother was brought up in the old fashioned way of teaching a young lady all the graces. She was to have been a wife and a mother and a gracious hostess. Life was rough and tough out here. She learned to do it.

The time Hennessy's mansion was opened up here at Park and Excelsior she was hired to just sit and stand by in the event some of the ladies damaged their gowns. Mom would replace a hook or a torn seam. She'd been taught how to sew, but she just swore she was a born (?) seamstress. (laughs) She was present at that event, the opening of that big mansion. She recalls Mr. Hennessy telling the people that were handling the big opening to put the shades up so the people who were around in the street could see in.

There was a club up in the mountains somewhere where all the wealthy people or up and coming wealthy used to spend their time—the Bonita Club (?). She was up there working. She was waiting on tables then. She was still not married. The word came that Cornelius Kelley had been called to return to Butte. He subsequently became the president of the Anaconda Copper Mining Company and went on to New York. It was Mom's—she said—good luck to be the one to call him to come back from fishing. When she called to him, he just dropped his fishing pole because he had an idea what the message was. She helped him to get ready to come back to Butte. He was appointed president of the company. He felt that little incident was so important that he never forgot Mom. Whenever he came back to Butte, he sent little gifts to her. My

father, who subsequently became a podiatrist—he was originally a barber...Mr. Kelley always called upon him when he came back to Butte for Dad to take care of him.

MM: Had your father been born here in Butte?

PD: My father was born in India. Montana had already become a state. I don't really know exactly what all happened. He was brought here by a missionary and put in school and received most of his education...I don't know where. Finally, after he and Mom were married, he went back to school in Boston to study podiatry. My oldest brother and my younger sister had been born and he left the three children home with Mom while he was away at school and then he came back and established his practice.

In the meantime he'd left a certain amount of money to keep Mom and the rest of us going. Mom never spent any of it. She did other things to make money to keep the family going. We lived exactly one block north of here. Then Dad came back and established his practice.

MM: Did your mother continue working after your father came back?

PD: No. Only occasionally as a favor to certain people, she might help them do things, but then having three children kept her pretty busy. My brother, my younger sister, and I went to California in 1918. On the train going to California, we met the Japanese actor Sessue Hayakawa. He gave me the little doll that sits up there on that windowsill.

MM: What year were you born in?

PD: Not for the record, but it's up there in the courthouse in case anyone wants to look it up. My brother and sister and I went to California and returned with two boys and a girl, my youngest sister having died in California. We lived on West Broadway from the time I was a young baby until the '20s, when we moved over here. We've been in this house ever since.

MM: When you were talking about remembering the night of the Armistice [November 11, 1918], do you recall...did a lot of men from Butte go to World War One?

PD: Now that I don't know. The fact that I was quite young...but what my father was trying to impress on us...that this was a bloody war that had been fought to save democracy, the democratic way. He wanted us to remember it because the mine whistles blew and the boys were hawking extra newspapers, and that really made quite an impression on me. By the time I was back here for a trip, which incidentally cost 99 dollars round trip from New York to California...

MM: How awful. (laughs)

PD: That's what a dollar bought in those days. At the time that I was on that trip that we took to California, they announced that the Second World War had begun...Germany had declared war on England. I think they'd already invaded Poland, but Britain entered the war before the United States. We helped Britain until Pearl Harbor, and that's when we became involved.

Having had that vividly in mind—that this was, “The last war we'll ever fight during your lifetime,” is what my father said—I thought, “Oh my Lord, Daddy, here's another one,” not really realizing that it was going to encompass the whole world again. I heard Franklin Roosevelt say on the radio, “This is a day that will live in infamy.” (laughs)

I watched one of the companies there train right across the street from the building where I worked. They went through their maneuvers. There was a great big empty area and they were preparing...being trained to be sent overseas.

MM: About that time, 1918 I think, was also the year that there was a big flu epidemic in the United States. Someone told me that it hit very hard here in Butte, and a lot of people died or were very sick. Can you recall that at all?

PD: I only recall that from having been told about it in later years because none of the members of my family ever had it. I know they talked about so many people died as a result of the flu epidemic. There was also an epidemic of polio that hit a great many of the children around here, but that was before I was born. My oldest brother had polio. My mother always says that she's responsible for praying so hard that the polio attack that my brother suffered would never go above his knee and it never did. He's able to get around without crutches. He's not badly crippled but slightly.

MM: Was your mother a very religious person?

PD: Very religious, but not one of those overly devout persons that you couldn't do this and you couldn't do that. She was always praying. She had a great deal of faith and brought us up to have a belief in God and to depend on Him, but it never reached the point where life was miserable because Mom was so devoutly religious.

MM: Was she a member of a church here in town?

PD: At that time, we had quite a colored population here. We had two churches: a Methodist and a Baptist. We went to both. We were neither Methodist nor Baptist. My mother was born into a Presbyterian family and brought up in a Presbyterian family, but when she came here, she couldn't belong to the Presbyterian Church. They were able to support two churches here for a great many years. There were forms of discrimination here in Butte.

MM: I wanted to ask you about that. There was quite a large black population here, wasn't there?

PD: Large for a mining community. I think there was between 80,000 and 100,000 here at one time. It wasn't large. I don't know whether it ever went above...it was probably less than 2,000.

MM: What kind of work did they do?

PD: A lot of the men worked for the Anaconda Copper Mine [ACM]. The ACM company men had their own private club which would be of the type of the Union League Club in New York—wealthy men. The men worked there as waiters. In other words, they kind of ran the club. A lot of them were valets for the very wealthy men. The women were housekeepers and maids.

Con Kelley...one of them was really what the English now call nannies. She was a nanny to the five daughters. Actually, she was really the one who taught all the five daughters all the amenities—the social graces. She left here to go east with the Kelley family. She remained in their employ until the youngest daughter had come of age. Of course, the Kelley family never lost...got out of touch with...She was Mrs. Willis in those days. They always saw to it that she lived very well.

I had gone to her wedding there in New York. She was in her 70s when she married and so was her husband. I was present at the wedding and also their 25th anniversary. He lived to either 100 or almost 100. She was 95 when she died. A spry, active little bird-like woman who never quit moving. She would talk about the old ladies in her church and that they got on her nerves talking about their aches and pains. Here she is in her 90s, flitting around. She was almost 95 when she passed. She was getting ready to go to a luncheon and just fell dead. She had been present as the Matron of Honor at my parent's wedding so that, when I went to New York, she became my New York mother.

MM: Were any black men allowed to work in the mines?

PD: Whether they were allowed to or not, they never did. To my knowledge there were never any of them that went underground. Even to this day, none of them are underground. Some of them worked uptown for various businesses up there. What some of them actually did, I don't know. I suppose either Janet or...

MM: When you said there were forms of discrimination here in Butte, what forms did that take?

PD: It took the form of being unable to attend the white churches and not being able to eat in certain places. As I look back on it now, it was very subtly done. It was not done in the theaters. They didn't have certain areas where you had to sit. We were just kept out of certain places, and by the time I was coming along I just knew there were certain places I couldn't go and I just never bothered.

MM: Did you ever question that?

PD: When I was in grade school, I was the only one in grade school. Then how can you discriminate against one person? You can't. We were all seated in alphabetical order. I was a D, and the Ds were pretty well close to the front. (laughs)

What happened was, the McKinley School burned down when I was still in grade school, which split all of the children attending that school up into various schools. What happened with my brother—being handicapped—he was sent as close to home as possible because you had to walk. There were no school buses then. I was able-bodied, so I had to walk the greater distance, although I did go to the Lincoln school which is right over here. From there to the administration building on Montana Street, I think that was just one grade. Then, way down the foot of Idaho Street was the Webster School. That was quite a long one, from the Webster over to the Garfield, which was further east.

That was quite some walking in the winter time. I graduated from the eighth grade at the Garfield School. One thing, they didn't close the schools in the winter time. You went, deep snow or not. You were bundled up so that, if you fell down, you'd never break anything because you were too well padded. We found some shortcuts, so we thought, to get to school. They may have closed the school maybe once or twice, but I don't recall. I think now, when they have four or five inches on the ground, the next thing you read in the newspaper is that the schools are closed because of the snow. We used to have much heavier snows then.

All the way over to the east side, they've subsequently torn down the old junior high. That's quite the walk from here: up the hill, all the way across Park, then on up to Broadway, and up to Granite depending on which windows you wanted to look in. I went there until I was a sophomore in high school. Butte High School stood right at the top of the hill here where the Catholic School is. That was really, I felt...Walking to school then was just no problem because I was so close to home. They didn't rebuild the McKinley until long after I'd left here.

MM: Did the black population live in one neighborhood?

PD: No. There was no discrimination that I know of as far as the area where you would live. We lived here. Another woman lived way out on Granite. Another one up on Emmett, just below where the old ore grade used to go. I suppose you could call it discrimination in the type of house they lived in. There used to be a lot of little cabins in between some of these very lovely homes in this area. Most of the wealthy people lived out here on the west side. The one woman lived in a cabin. It was a nice cabin. A log cabin isn't as lowly as you think when it's all fixed up. There were some up there at the top of the hill on Broadway and Crystal. Some across the street here; some over on Galena Street across from, I think that was the Emma Mine; some at the foot of Idaho and some on North Idaho; some on Colorado. There was not that type of discrimination in that they were all in one area. That wasn't evident in those days.

Some of them really have some nice homes which they bought. They saved their money and bought the property and then they fixed it up. Although, the time we were contemplating buying this house my mother tells me there were some meetings held behind closed doors that were going to keep us out of the house. We were just a block away in another house. That's where my mother's faith came in. She says she just told herself silently that she was going to own that house and said to God, "That's my house. No one else can buy it." We got it.

MM: Did your father have patients in both the white and black community—the different ethnic groups?

PD: Hadn't been for the white people, my father wouldn't have made it. They were his patients. They were the ones that went to him. They were the ones that kept us going, not the black population. It's been that way ever since. My brother is the only one here. I think there was one other one when my father first started practicing. My brother is the only one within quite a radius. There are only 20 podiatrists in the whole state of...

[End of Tape 1, Side A]

[Tape 1, Side B]

PD: When I finished at Oberlin, I went to New York for summer vacation, and I became a camp counselor for a YWCA camp. That was an all-black camp. When the camping season ended, I returned to New York to spend the rest of the summer. I actually never left home in this manner. The family with whom I lived—the Wollenwiss (?)—her parents...She was born and married in Helena. My mother and father were very close to her parents. She was married and had a young boy. They took me into their home and made a place for me to stay. That was 1935 so I lived with them from '35 until 1950, when I got my own apartment.

The reason for that was my younger sister had graduated from Bennett, and she came to New York. She came to New York and we needed a place for the two of us to be together. By that time, the husband had been hired as the first black to ever work for the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. They were building a housing complex in New York, and they took him on primarily to help in the tenet selection. They were picking an elite group because it was not a low-income project that they built. It was middle-income. There was no ceiling on what you earned, but you couldn't have earned below a certain amount in order to live there.

At that time, there were too few places for the up and coming middle class to live in. The Metropolitan always had a might of maintaining its properties and knowing that, with a given group, the property was going to be maintained without any worry that the tenets were going to tear it up.

I lived there until 1972. It was a beautiful place on the river with a beautiful interior park and gorgeous trees and a lawn and flower gardens. They had their maintenance department. They had their gardeners, and that was all they did was look after the grounds.

MM: How did you decide on Oberlin College? Were you studying music?

PD: It was selected because it was the first school in the country to admit Negroes and women—Negro women. I don't really know what to call ourselves. I grew up as a Negro and then suddenly we're blacks. (laughs)

MM: (laughs) I know. I'm always confused about that. Did you feel like you were a path breaker when you went to college? How did it feel?

PD: No. What happened...The older in grade school, there was no difference made, but when you went to high school, that's where the type of socializing of the dancing things became important to teenagers and that was where I cut off. There was some with whom I'd been very close growing up and at that point where they no longer had anything to do with me...

MM: Did you find that confusing?

PD: I didn't quite understand it until my father used to tell me I had to learn how to live alone for the rest of my life because there were going to always be times where you're going to be alone and you had to adjust. It didn't create a problem such as certain things become problems to today's teenagers. They fall apart because they're not part of the crowd or they're not in on everything. No one seems to try to develop the inner resources of these youngsters growing up, so when their life deals them a low blow, they can't stand back up. They either resort to drugs or something else. They have so many people run to psychiatrists where it's all within you to be able to work out your problems. It's not necessary. Nothing is too overwhelming that you can't overcome it, as long as it isn't a severe illness.

But I managed. I never really felt left out of things to the point that I withdrew from everything. I went right along. I've never felt that life was passing me by. I always felt that I know who I am. I know what I am. I know what I can make out of myself.

When some of the teachers wouldn't call on me in class...We had a very wonderful high school principal. When I sometimes go and complain, some of them would never call on me, he says, "What do you care? You're the one who gets A's on your papers when you turn them in. The ones that are giving all the wrong answers in the classroom just forget them. Go on studying and you'll soon be out of here and off on your own." Most of the time I made the honor roll and came home and did my studying. There was always my dad to play cards with, take long walks, or my mom to talk things over.

That young man right over there became a priest. I did want to go to the junior prom, but there was no one with whom to go. He was going to take me, but that was not to be allowed. That type of socializing wasn't permitted. I made it.

MM: How was it in college? Were there more Negro women there?

PD: There were more Negroes there in college. Although it was a school that didn't discriminate...I look back now and saw that there was more there than there was here. They didn't discriminate in placing you in the dormitory. They scattered you all around. But you were made to stay within your own group, which I thought about in later years: that was one way to say that the school never discriminated, but when they made you stay with your own, it was.

MM: How would they do that? Would you have to take the same classes?

PD: No. If you went to a dance, no one else ever danced with you. I don't care if the fellows in that classroom wanted to dance...Your fellow classmates who were a boy wanted to dance with you, it was just not done. Whereas other girls...the English didn't dance with the English and the French with the French and the Chinese with the Chinese. They had a lot of Chinese students then because they had a branch of Oberlin over in Shanxi, China. Some of those things you're not always aware of.

I was in college to get an education, not to run around and socialize. It was during the Depression, and my brother was in New York—New York University—and it was in ruin. That had to be a struggle on the part of my parents to keep two of us in school.

MM: I've heard the Depression was very hard here. How much younger was your sister?

PD: I'm three years younger than the older brother.

MM: Was your sister younger than you? Do you have a younger sister? I thought you said you had a younger sister?

PD: What, my brother?

MM: No. I thought you said you had a younger sister?

PD: Oh, she's quite a great deal younger than us. She's the last child in my family. She was a baby when I left home. There was another brother in between. There were three children dead and three still living. When I left home, there was my younger brother and my younger sister. My oldest brother and I were in college at the same time.

MM: Did you major in music when you went to Oberlin?

PD: That's another thing they said: a black person is not going to be able to make it in the concert world, especially a woman. If you majored in piano, you had to settle on being an accompanist at that time. At that time, most of the accompanists were men. Women are discriminated against, even today. There are not that many women pianists of note of all races.

I didn't go there with the purpose of majoring in music. I went to the Liberal Arts school. Sociology was in its early days, based on the principles established by Maude Addams [Jane Addams] of Hull House in Chicago. It was a completely different field than what it is today. Psychology and psychiatry kind of poked their heads up above the ground. They hadn't come into full bloom then.

MM: Were those the studies that you were most interested in?

PD: I majored in English and sociology, but I think the types of courses that I took are no longer being taught. They have no value in the present scheme of things. The social work courses that I took were very helpful because I did eventually end up as a social worker.

MM: Did you have an idea of what kind of work you wanted to do?

PD: No. I didn't. Part of that vacation I took in New York where I lived with this family...got there in June of '35, and, by September, I had a job with a temporary agency. It was called the

Emergency Relief Bureau then. I went to work for them. It subsequently became a permanent city department. When the examination was given, I took that and passed it. That's the only organization I worked for with the exception of the YMCA. I worked there temporarily. It was only one job (?).

The music classes that I had here, under a very excellent teacher...They gave music appreciation courses in high school which were a must. What you learned there and what I learned from my music teacher and the fact that I played the piano...When this opening came in the newspaper to write the music column...that wasn't supposed to be permanent. Their music critic retired. The editor was a friend of mine. He just said, "Do me a favor. These tickets keep coming in. We have no one to cover the concerts. Will you cover the concerts for me until we get someone?"

I was only too happy to do it because it was a struggle to get the money to go to these concerts, but I got there. We sat in Carnegie Hall in the two-bit seats. You were way at the top, at the roof! The Metropolitan Opera House was one dollar. You were so far away from the stage you had to take the big racing binoculars to see what was going on. You were above the ceiling in the main auditorium. I'd been going to the opera for years before I knew there was a huge chandelier at the top of the ceiling over the orchestra. I'd already become a music critic, and I was brought downstairs to the press row. Then I looked up and says, "Gee whiz, I never knew that was there!"

MM: What paper was this?

PD: It was the *New York Amsterdam News*. I went to cover the concert and gave him the copy. It started out with a little P.E.D. under there. I loved it. Getting to go to everything and sit in seats with all the critics of the major papers—the major dailies. I did it, and one day he said, "Why don't you go over there and let them take your picture?" I said, "What for?" He said, "You'll see." I turned my copy in that week; there was my byline with my picture. He says, "You're it!"

So I stayed on. After I really became a part of the newspaper, then I began talking to some of the other critics, and they said, "Well, we want you to join the critic circle. We get together and discuss various artists." Many of them were very helpful to me as far as writing the column. I knew how to play the piano. I knew how to play the organ. A friend who played the harp said, "Well, you've got to cover harp concerts at the..." Nicanor Zabaleta was a world concert harpist. She said, "You've got to learn to recognize the different types of harps. They're not all...every harp is not a concert harp. It's like the concert grand piano is a great big instrument. Then there's a smaller one, and then there's the baby grand, which they use in the home which is not suitable for concert work." So she taught me to play a harp.

Then a girl from Butte who'd been a concert singer took me under her wing and told me all the fine points of vocal production—the art of singing. She gave me several books on that art. You want to read up on your material so you know what you're doing.

In the meantime, I'm working regularly, but I'm learning all these things. I became quite familiar...Someone else showed me the bowing of playing a violin; although, my youngest brother had studied violin, but he gave that up. Here and there, people who played different instruments said, "Well if you're interested, we will tell you." And I was interested! In order to write a critical review, you've got to know something about the instruments different artists play, and what to look for in their production of music. Everyone that sits at a piano doesn't play it in the same way, and each artist doesn't project their voice in the same way. I did that until I came home.

MM: You became a social worker working for this emergency relief?

PD: Yes, and it finally became the Department of Social Services.

MM: Was that a brand new agency when you started working for it?

PD: It was a brand new agency when I entered it because it was set up as an emergency agency to take care of the people during the Depression. It began to absorb the work that was done by many of the private charitable organizations who had had to depend on the wealthy foundations to keep them going. As the money from the richer people began to peter out because the Depression had wiped out many big fortunes, they could not continue. It expanded into a fulltime agency.

MM: Did you enjoy that work?

PD: Yes, I did, but I was only a field worker for a very short time, meaning that I didn't go into the homes to make visits after about...I was only out in the field...I don't think no more than ten months—

MM: Then what did you do?

PD: —when I was brought indoors to work for one of the administrators, something that I'd been asked to do because I had a great deal of organizational ability, and I could do this. I was given a few projects to do and I did them. I suppose, too, it had a great deal to do with having had to be on your own, growing up, and learn how to devise and how to do. When you're given a problem, you had to figure it out and solve it!

An opening came in the legal division, and I was interviewed and given that. I remained in the legal division until I retired. In the interim, I took some courses in St. John's Law School to familiarize myself with the law for laypeople. A great many of the judges used to...they took a liking to those representatives in the court. In order to take a break, sometimes, they'd call you in to chambers and explain the fine points of the law, and, in the meantime, they could have a cigarette. They're supposed to be conferring, and you're just really talking.

Some of them were saying, "Why don't you girls study law? Be the first women to enter the field?" But the law was not changed until after I came home in 1972. One judge kept urging us to take the bar exam. We said, "Well, we don't have any legal training." He said, "You don't need it. You've learned enough working here. You could pass the bar. Go ahead and take it, go ahead and take it." None of us did. That law was changed after we came home where you had to have a law degree. I knew this particular judge that urged us to take the bar...I lost my train of thought because suddenly it occurred to me we're not talking about Butte!

MM: Oh, but that's okay. (laughs)

PD: (laughs) But any purpose in doing that is once we...we could go anywhere. In the field of endeavor, we had our own ability to earn a living right with us. We could carry it around. You didn't have to set up...it's not like certain phases of work that you go into. It always has to be there, and if it isn't there you can't find a place to work. Like a craft. Craftsman can go anywhere.

MM: Why did you decide to come back to Butte when you retired?

PD: By that time when I had retired I was...I retired in 1969. I went to work for the newspaper full time. In the meantime, my mother kept getting older, and my brother was saying...No one urged me to come home, but he was just saying that Mom was getting along in years. At the point where I could see the owner of the paper was getting ready to sell...He wanted to get out of it. He was getting along. I thought maybe...yes. The editor for whom I worked, they let him go, although why, I can't tell. The new editor, I found I couldn't talk to him. So I says, "Well, I'm going to go look after Mom."

MM: Had your father died?

PD: My father died in '58. She was living alone, but she managed to do for herself right up until 1978. She maintained a great interest in what was going on in the community and belonged to the Women's Club and this group...the church women from all the groups...a couple of times she forgot there were meetings. She'd been uptown to get what she want. She came home and she'd strip down to her easy clothes and someone would call, "I'm going to pick you up because the meeting is at such a time." Mom went right back upstairs and got completely dressed again, re-did her hair, put on her makeup, got ready and was off. I'm the other woman. I would not re-dress once I removed my street clothes.

Now today I'm not completely dressed because, when I got up this morning, I was sniffing. I thought, I'm going downstairs and eat my breakfast because I'm a little hungry. The time got by, and I did not get back up there to dress before you arrived—

MM: That's okay.

PD: —but I decided to do what chores I had to do down here and then time got away from me. Coming back to Butte, they had the beautiful Columbia Gardens. You've heard of that, nestled in the most beautiful...the garden spot out there in the foot of the Divide.

MM: Did you go there a lot as children?

PD: All the time because it had a playground and the amusements and the flowers and it was supervised.

MM: Were they still having Butte Miner's Day celebrations out there?

PD: Yes, but I didn't ever see any of those. They had a lot of parades around here. The parades came out here across Broadway because all of the wealthy people lived out here, and they were not about to go uptown. They brought the parades out Broadway to Excelsior, down Excelsior, back up Park. They never went out on the Flat to my knowledge. We would just sit out on the porch and watch the parades and the Miner's Day celebration.

I don't know what celebration they were holding...in which some of the men that worked for the company got their hands on some dynamite. It may have been a Fourth of July. Dynamite was available to the men working for the company, but I recall this group got in a circle and blew themselves to kingdom come in this celebration, whether they were intoxicated or not. I think it was out here in East Butte somewhere in a big vacant lot. We all heard that big explosion and wondered where on earth...They shouldn't be blasting above ground at this hour!
(laughs)

MM: (laughs) You must have been small when the Speculator Fire happened, but do you remember that?

PD: Which one?

MM: The Speculator Fire in 1917? Up at the mine?

[End of Tape 1, Side B]

[Tape 2, Side A]

PD: We wouldn't have been allowed to go to it anyway. We were too little. I don't remember any real big fire when I was growing up. I remember when the American Theater burned down, but I happened to have been home on a vacation. That's where Skaggs building is now. That's where the American Theater was.

MM: Did you come home often to visit during those years?

PD: Most of the time, there were two to three years because it took a lot of spending and saving in the Depression years to get the money to come home. Even though the fare was...In 1939, that 99 dollar roundtrip was because they had a World's Fair in San Francisco and one in New York. This is first class, mind you! That was the reason I happened to have been on my way to California because I was going to the World's Fair in California and also to visit a very dear friend of my parents whom I called Aunt Mary. She had lived in Butte. She and her husband had to leave here because of the altitude.

MM: Did your sister live with you all those years in New York once she graduated from college?

PD: No. She didn't come to live with me until 1955. At the time she'd graduated from Bennett. She came to New York to look for work. She figured that once she got a job we'd have to have our own apartment. The family with whom I lived felt...he felt we should be on our own by then. He says, "You're at the age where you can be off by yourself." He was stricter on me than my own father was.

Whether my father would have been that strict when it came to dating boys, I don't know, because there were none to date around here. The few that there were...there were always group parties! There was no going off singly. You always got together because there were too few cars. Maybe one fellow had a car, and he'd take everyone who wanted to go to Helena or to Anaconda. You'd go to Helena to a party or to Anaconda to a party.

There was always a party here if we wanted to get together. The rug came up off the floor and the old Victrola sat there. We had the party and one would fix the refreshments. She and Dad felt that, as long as the fellows were coming to see me, they could see me in my own home. They knew where I was. I had no feeling that I was being watched over, like the youngsters do today. Mom and Pa kept to their business. No, that was different. It was nice to be home.

True, the hours were set when you had to be home. You accepted that they had a curfew around here. You were off the streets by nine o'clock. There was no rebellion against that. If you were uptown or off away from your own home and the curfew blew, you burst into a...You became an Olympic racer getting home.

MM: Was that for youngsters?

PD: Up to teenagers that you had to be home by eight o'clock. It was so much a part of your daily life that you never thought of disobeying it. Nothing was really going on that we had to have it. I suppose research would find a reason why. They just taught you that the place to be was home; there was nothing else to be doing after nine o'clock unless you were plotting some devilment.

MM: (laughs) Did you ever plot any devilment?

PD: Not really. No destructive devilment. It was mostly what you would call mischief. We never went out purposely to destroy anything. Trick-or-treating night on Halloween, you would never dream of breaking a window. If you did, you were going to get it. Your parents would have to replace that window, and, during the Depression years, they couldn't afford to cover the damages.

MM: When you were living in New York, this family was more strict than your father was about you going out?

PD: Yes. They'd screen the fellows. If he didn't take a liking to them, he'd go. I didn't go. I didn't sit and mope, either.

MM: You never married?

PD: I didn't marry only because the fellow that I really was engaged to marry, and that I really cared for, was killed during the Second World War. I never found anyone else that I really loved, so that was that.

That's why I think that the younger group today...They get the props knocked from under them so easily. For instance, when Mr. Nickels—that was the name of the family—would say, "I don't care for the young man. I don't want you to go out," I just accepted it. I was living with them. I felt no form of being squelched or I wanted to do my own thing. It was part of how you were brought up then, the mores of family life then, which is all so different today.

MM: When your sister moved to New York and you got an apartment together, what kind of job did she find?

PD: She went to work for the Board of Missions for the Methodist Church. I think Bennett College was a Methodist school.

MM: I think so, yes.

PD: I don't know of the founding families of Bennett, whether they were Methodist, but it seems to me that school is connected with the church. They didn't put up the money, the

church didn't...but anyway, she went to work for them. She stayed with them until she got married.

When her marriage broke up...where did she go? I think she went to Washington. By that time, my youngest brother had graduated from Howard University. She went down there and went to work for Howard University medical school. She stayed with them. She's in their school of ophthalmology. That's where she works.

My brother went to work for the United States Naval Department as an engineer. His work entailed work on the atomic submarines: inspecting these submarines...going on trial runs before the Naval Department accepted the ship. He's six foot four inches, so it took a lot of crowding to get him in a submarine. He was aboard one submarine at the time [USS] Thresher went to the bottom. That's when mother and her friends and all were so afraid that he had taken that...gone with the group out on the trial run. He stayed with the Naval Department. He just retired. Doesn't seem possible that enough years went by, but they did.

Now he's gone to work as an administrator for Virginia Union University. That was the first school he attended before he went on to...he got one degree there and then went on to Howard for another degree. Because he had done so much work for the school during his student days that immediately when he'd retired they said, "We remember what you've done. We want you to come back here as an administrator."

MM: When you were back East, did you ever go visit your mother's family in Virginia?

PD: Her sister, who lived in Virginia. My grandmother was dead by the time I...I never got back to the family at all where my mother grew up. Never got to that part of Virginia, but I used to go down and visit my mother's sister and her family. That was the first time I encountered what you would call out and out discrimination; the moment you set foot on the train there was a car for you to sit in and you couldn't sit anyplace else.

MM: This was in the South?

PD: Yes, I think Union Station, the trains came in...They're parked in Virginia rather than Washington D.C. I think, I don't know. Although it seems to me that Union Station in Washington was across from the Capitol. Whatever it was, when you got on the train in Washington going south, you got on a separate car. I must admit some of the friends that I made working there in New York before I had made any trips south...I found at that point a friend that you could depend on was a Southerner. They let you know right away that we have nothing to do...we don't like your group and that's it. Northerners would pretend.

MM: Did you notice...when the Civil Rights Movement started in the early...?

PD: Not until the '60s.

MM: Were there big changes in your working conditions? When you went back to visit the South, did you notice?

PD: I didn't go to the South after a certain period of time. I never saw what was going on. Once you went south...My aunt's family had a big farm out in the country there in the Amelia, Virginia. Once you're on the farm, and all of the different families lived around, there was no reason for you to go anywhere where you're discriminated against. You just go from farm to farm and the family was all there. Although, I noticed that surrounding my aunt's place were what were members of the family were members of the white race; but there was all this intermingling going back to prior to the Civil War. I found it a little surprising on occasion where somebody was supposed to be white or were white to call me...saying we all belong to one family, so there's none of that going on.

The one conductor on the train when I was going from Richmond to Amelia...I was sitting in the coach marked colored and the conductor came and said, "Will you sit in the back of the other car?" I'd heard so many tales about the South I did what I was told because I was afraid I'd never end up getting back alive. That's propaganda! (laughs)

MM: (laughs) I think there was probably a lot of truth to it, too. When you came back to Butte, did you notice big changes here in town?

PD: Changes in that most of the theaters were beginning to close down and that certain things were being phased out. Knowing that I was only home on a vacation, I never looked around much for changes because I'd come home to visit my family. I stayed home, and I visited with them. I was going right back to New York. There was discrimination practiced in New York.

MM: Really?

PD: One group that I worked...a social club that I joined: we began back in the '30s, trying to get them to hire along the major street there in Harlem, 125th Street. Stores were all owned by white people. They hired no coloreds and made all the money. No colored employees. So it was kind of a subtle thing that we did.

MM: You were trying to get them to hire...?

PD: Yes, to hire them. We were going about it in a militant way.

MM: What kind of things did you do?

PD: We talked to them. Did they think it was fair not to hire someone? They began to. Then there was one young lady in New York who never worked. All she'd do is dress herself up beautifully and go downtown to a restaurant and sit and sit and sit. They didn't serve her and

she'd put her lawyer's card on the table and leave. There was all these 500 dollar fines. Five hundred dollars was a lot of money during the Depression.

MM: That was a pretty early sit-in! (laughs)

PD: Yes, but she made them pay. It was when the war started that I remember her saying, "Now I've got to go to work." That was ending. You couldn't do it. She was a beautiful girl...a beautiful kind of...since we come in all colors, I don't know what color she was called—a nice brown. The family was mixed up with the Cherokee Indians, so she had that thin straight Indian hair. When she got dressed up, she looked so beautiful and always conducted herself like a lady. There was never any banging on the tables. They'd come (?) and say, "We don't serve you." Very well, the card went on. (unintelligible)

MM: Were you successful in getting some of those shopkeepers to hire colored people?

PD: Yes, along 125th Street. I quit doing this at the point when it began to involve large groups of people who would turn militant. I never felt you could accomplish things by breaking up things because, if you broke up the very thing that you wanted to get into, you were destroying it, and it would no longer be there. In the early days, it wasn't always true that they destroyed everything. By the time Martin Luther King came along, and was telling them to do it peacefully, it went along very peacefully.

I remember the time when the term *overreact* was coined. Now it's all used so commonly. Every time I hear it, I just...I says, "That's a coined phrase. It doesn't mean anything." They did go on an out-and-out riot in Harlem when Martin Luther King was assassinated. Mayor Lindsay said they were overreacting, and I thought, "Overreacting? Dash dash dash. They're rioting!" That was what the word was supposed to have meant. Now it's just...anytime you get a little angry, you're overreacting.

MM: When did you stop working with this group?

PD: I stopped working with them I guess...the very early '50s. We'd accomplished what we set out to do on 125th Street.

MM: You worked with them all through the late '30s and '40s?

PD: The late '30s. In the '40s, there was no problems because they needed employees during wartime to replace the ones who were being sent overseas—the men. The women then were being used to take the jobs the men were doing. Some of the sales clerks, the male sales clerks, were drafted. We were replacing them with women; whereas women's groups weren't working on getting jobs for themselves...then it was just done as a matter of necessity.

MM: After World War Two, when people came back from the war, were a lot of the colored people then laid off? Or were they able to keep their jobs?

PD: Most of the layoffs occurred in the defense industry. Comes to people of all races then. They began to shut down those industries and convert to peacetime. That had nothing to do with racial discrimination as far as I could see. Those who were trained to build munitions were not trained to build other things. We lost interest in it, started moving on to other deals of endeavor. I think I was edging towards this work with the newspaper. At that point, I lost interest in everything else. It was very taxing. I was working every day.

MM: When did you start writing the music reviews?

PD: It had to be '57, '58. You were there at the concert hall from eight to ten thirty, at the opera house from eight to eleven, sometimes eleven thirty by the time we got home. All the notes I had taken, I had to write them out while I could still hear the music and before I forgot everything. You have to empty your mind in order to be ready for the next thing. You'd get that all outlined for writing up later. Get to bed at two o'clock and up at five.

MM: How frequently did you do reviews?

PD: I had a weekly column, but I had nightly concerts.

MM: You must have had an incredible amount of energy.

PD: I did it this way. Those with whom I remained very close know that once a month on Friday night I came home and no one was to call me. No one was to come by. It was go to bed time. Sleep until I woke up, get up and eat, not get dressed, rest completely. If I wanted to go back to bed, I would sleep. I didn't have to listen for the phone, listen for the doorbell. Everyone respected my wishes so I would have Friday night, Saturday night, and all day Saturday and all day Sunday of complete rest. Pick up and go for another month so that it did work out. I had a very understanding director. I didn't lose any time from work, but if I was up walking around an awful lot, drinking a lot of ice cold water, she'd know that I was keeping myself awake. Any job that I was given to do, I did it. As long as you didn't tell me how to do, or keep after me to do it this way. If you let me do it, figure out how it was to be done, it got done. Never any complaints.

MM: Did you always review classical music?

PD: Yes, that's all. That's what I had learned, classical music. The old Victor Rensio (?) records on the old Victrola over there...My father always brought many of those home, a new one, I think, about once a month. That's what I grew up listening to—the classics. Hardly any jazz. There weren't that many recordings, I don't think. I don't remember when they started making recordings of jazz. The musical appreciation courses given in high school were of the classics

only—the operas, the major singers of the time. [Enrico] Caruso was the most famous singer then. They'd play the arias that he recorded. You'd have to know what opera it was from and which aria he was singing. This was all taught to us in high school. My music teacher had a toy symphony orchestra.

MM: Oh really?

PD: All her students played some instrument and we learned the symphonies, became familiar with that music.

MM: Then you were very well prepared.

PD: Yes, and then you were studying...being taught the classics when you're studying music. They didn't teach anything else. Most of the piano literature...and Irene St. Quentin had been taught by Teodor Leszetycki, who was a student of Franz Liszt. She had a marvelous musical background and a wonderful way of teaching her students.

MM: She was your teacher here?

PD: She was here in Butte in the old Owsley building that stood on Clark and Main. Became the Medical Arts Center. It burned down since I've been home. Butte Business College was at the top of that building. She had a wonderful studio there, with two Mason and Hamlin concert grands on which we played for our monthly recital. The parents and the public was invited to those. Surrounding that were the practice rooms where you took your lesson. Our piano sat under there.

MM: When you came back to Butte from New York, finally, did you find it hard to adjust after living in New York all that time?

PD: Oh yes, I found...still find it...Thank heavens for television and the PBS channels! You have your dramas and the Shakespearean plays are on. The concerts come from New York.

MM: And you get your *New York Times* every day.

PD: I get the *New York Times*. Then you have the...the vital discussions come on on PBS. Not that I don't look at some of the other programs. I'm really a pushover for quiz shows or game shows. I love the ones that make you think. It's very nice on the nights they telecast the operas from the stage at the Metropolitan. I know we get the tape, not the live performance. Although they say live, there's a two-hour difference. It has to be the tape.

I get my chair and I put it right there in the hall. If I want a little snack...I'm not much of a pop drinker, but, if I do want a soda, everything is right on hand. I'm all stripped down for bed and I sit and I just watch it. The one nice thing is that when it's all over all I have to do is go up the

stairs and not take the subway home. (laughs) Then you go to bed with all that lovely music in your ear. You drift off. By the time you wake up in the morning, it's gone. Not completely.

[End of Tape 2, Side A]

[Tape 2, Side B]

MM: ...really fascinating. Were many of the people that you had known when you were growing up still here in Butte when you came back?

PD: Oh yes. Among the older people, yes.

MM: It seems, with the drastic decline in population, that a lot of people...

PD: Butte is a community. Those of all races...the younger people who want to get ahead have to leave Butte. There is nothing for them to do here. So they lost the cream of those who have gone away to become...or done so well in their field of endeavor elsewhere. They never made it here because there's no jobs for them.

One thing I do...I grew up here in the state of Montana in the city of Butte when the state of Montana ranked number one out of having the best educational system of any state in the union. That went on for a good ten to fifteen years. When I went to school, I got a very good education. By the time I was out of high school, I was prepared for any and everything. The rest was all what I now call refinement.

I had been taught how to study, how to think for myself, where to go to find what I needed. If I had a lesson that I needed some more information, immediately, you went to the encyclopedia for an expansion on that subject. We were taught how to write, how to spell. By the time you got out of grade school, you knew how to spell. They taught you geography. You knew where all the countries in the world were. They subsequently changed the names, and they don't teach that anymore. By the time you got to high school, that's where you were taught your English, the fundamentals of writing, how to express yourself both verbally and in writing. We all had to take Latin because our language stems so much from the Latin.

MM: Someone told me that practically all the teachers that she had were Irish girls. Do you recall that?

PD: Whether they were all Irish, I don't know, but they were all very young. I'm trying to figure...some of them are still living. Maybe they were only about ten years older than I. It was a very young group.

My French teacher lived way over on East Park. Emily Powers, I'll never forget her. She was the type of person that you liked her as a teacher and then liked her as a friend. One other girl and I would walk all the way over there when we didn't understand something about the lesson. She'd invite us in and she said, "You did not come over about the lesson." We came to visit, so why didn't you say so! She'd invite us in and give us cookies and chocolate, and we'd walk all the way home.

There's a building in the area where she lived. It's that one building on East Park. It's a red building. They look like they're either going to tear it down or fix it up. All the churches and everything around it are gone, so that was quite some block.

During grade school time, the teacher you had lived in the immediate area, right around here up on Granite, up on Broadway. If you were out whooping it up and down until curfew time, skating, then the next day the teacher would call on you and you wouldn't know the answer. She'd say, "Yes, because you were out playing." You would never think about talking back to them because you hadn't done your homework, and you had homework.

Walter studied up in his room. I studied at the dining room table. John and Mary Bee were younger, so that...but we were kept separate so that there was no interfering with our studies. When the time came for me to practice the piano, the other children were sent out. My brother learned to play the saxophone, and when it was time for him to practice, we were out of here! No teasing. My youngest brother was studying the violin, so he put in his hour's practice. We did not go into the room where they were to disturb them. My parents were paying money to give us the lessons, and we were not to interfere so that became part of it.

MM: Did you have chores that you had to do around the house as a child?

PD: Oh yes. We all did.

MM: What kind of things would you have to do?

PD: There was our dusting and our helping...All the spring cleaning of course. Washing the silver and washing the china. My chore was to dust and help change the beds. The boys did the heavy work; the girls did the lighter work. I can remember my mother bringing the girls up...You could never lift anything heavier than their head. That's man's work. I'm the type of a person who feels that, if I need certain things done, I've got to get a man to do it. I'm not into women's liberation. I love for men to open doors for me and to tip their hats. I like them to be gracious.

Some things, I just don't do. I won't cross...too, in high school, the girls were taught the fundamentals of doing things around the house because Daddy and the boys...Sometimes, when they were not home and a screw needed tightening or something else needed to be done, at least you knew what the screwdriver or wrench or all those tools were for and you did it. The boys were always taught the fundamentals of how to get a meal together because Mamma could be in the hospital giving birth, and by that time the boys were husbands. If the other children were home, the father had to know how to prepare a meal for them.

MM: Did your mother teach you how to cook?

PD: Yes. The only thing I didn't learn to do was bake bread and pie crusts. I knew how to cook, but I had to relearn coming here to the high altitude. It's so different from the low altitudes.

MM: I know. Some of my recipes haven't worked. Were you and your brother and sisters born at home, or did your mother go to the hospital?

PD: Oh no, hospital. There are some who have been born at home, but...Murray Hospital was up here on Quartz...Was it Quartz and Main or Quartz and...? I don't know. It's gone. My brother was born there. I was born there. All of us, I think, were born in the very hospital. All except my youngest brother. He was born in California. I know some were born at home. I never witnessed it. My mother went to assist in a birth.

I don't think I was completely aware of it, but she did do a great deal for the sick and ailing from the time she first came here. The hospital still stands there: it's down Continental Drive from Silver-Bow General. She went out there all the time with fruit for the patients in that hospital. The men at one time and the women at one time she said. She'd save her money to buy the fruit to distribute to the people. What did they call that? That was the county hospital I think. Of course, my mother's last year was spent in a nursing home. Someone always coming, even men, bringing fruit. I admire the people who could go out there and bring the fruit to all those people because I wouldn't set foot in a nursing home now.

I had surgery just this past August. The surgeon was talking about putting me in a nursing home to convalesce. I said, "You want to kill me? I'd never come out alive!" So I stayed in the hospital and, when I came out, I went to my sister-in-law and brother. He was talking about that before...I had just come in. At the point where I was being discharged, my sister-in-law and brother were just...it was a foregone conclusion, so I don't know why the nursing home ever came up because they weren't going to permit that.

MM: I'm kind of running out of questions, so...(laughs)

PD: I suppose you're aware of the fact that at the Columbia Gardens, every Thursday is when the youngsters went out to pick the pansies? They put on a beautiful display—

MM: I heard that. Did you used to go do that?

PD: —in the shape of the Anaconda symbol. What is that, an arrowhead? That was one bed of pansies. Another one, I think, was a harp. Another one looked like an urn with flowers growing out. On Thursdays, you could go and pick the blossoms, and no one ever pulled them up by the root. You picked them carefully because they grow more profusely the more they're picked. Everything was supervised, but not all that closely because I don't think we...I was never quite aware that they had someone out there on Children's Day...

(break in tape)

PD: ...opened. We thought that was the grandest theater that we ever saw! Brand new Fox with the big auditorium. There was a ballroom in that building because they had a dance marathon down there. I was still in high school. The dance marathons were being held during the Depression years. These young people...I think they were given in communities all over the country. They would dance themselves practically to death in order to earn money. We'd come from high school and go in the door there on Washington Street into the big ballroom. I don't know how many people know there's a ballroom there or how often they use it or maybe they tore it out.

MM: I had never heard that before.

PD: Yes. That pavilion that stood out at the Columbia Gardens had the finest dance hall of any place in the Pacific Northwest. To think that it had to go. They didn't have to tear out that Columbia Gardens. They call it progress, but that's destructive progress.

MM: I heard that after they...that they had torn it out because they were supposed to start the mining there. Then they found out there wasn't any ore...

PD: ...two bits worth of metal. Boils down to the company wasn't going to foot the bill to keep the place going. I think W. A. Clark gave that property to the people of Butte in perpetuity, which means forever, but it became more and more costly to keep it up. Once the company was absorbed into a great conglomerate...Conglomerates to my way of thinking are nothing but another word for destruction. A conglomerate is a consumer of comestibles and comestibles have to do with food. It's the little companies...They got a lot. They claim they lose a penny. It's a tax write off.

MM: It seems like the company has always had its way here in Butte.

PD: It's been a major industry with pros and cons. When you have a one industry town, you're always going to blame the one industry, but it hasn't always been a one industry town. The Hansen packing company was here when I was growing up. That employed a lot of people. There were other industries here. Not everyone was a miner here in Butte. When you have 80 to a 100,000 people, they didn't have that many miners underground. They had other industries here. They can blame the company if they want, but they've got to blame themselves too.

I happen to have mentioned to a group of people when they were getting ready to tear Carnegie Hall down...I always thought about the differences of New Yorkers and that they can't band together, that they don't care. It was the young people who surrounded Carnegie Hall and said, "There are a lot of dead bodies you're going to climb over to remove the first brick." Their determination saved that concert hall. Anytime a group gets together to decide to do something, they can do it.

It was a half-hearted undertaking here to save the Gardens. They didn't fight hard enough. I don't see where anyone was willing...They came here, but no one was willing to quote the dollar and cent amount of keeping it up. How much each one would be willing to pledge to maintain it never was mentioned. This group of women dismissed it: "We're not talking about Carnegie Hall."

I said, "I'm talking about if you want to keep it. It's going to be a do-or-die project, an around the clock thing. Not a few people with a few pieces of paper that someone was going to sign."

The company got blamed.

I hadn't been back long enough to infiltrate myself into the community, since I would be considered, "Well, you've been away from here. You didn't stay, so who are you to come back and tell us how to go about doing something?" It was that attitude. Therefore, I never did become part of the community. I said, "Well, if that's the way you do things." New Yorkers will beat on a desk. Noise can accomplish a lot. You can beat on a desk without breaking it. Some of those people behind the desk have a way of throwing words at you and not listening. If you want to get their attention you say, "Now you listen!" That startles them and that momentary silence allows you to get your word in, and you really haven't become disorderly. (laughs)

MM: (laughs) I can see where you were a good organizer.

PD: Because if politeness doesn't do it, crashing cymbals will. You've not done anything by (claps) crashing cymbals. You've made them shut-up for a second, and that's when you get your mouth going. They're still so startled they start listening.

MM: I'll have to remember that. It's a good tactic.

PD: Have you really destroyed anything? No.

MM: I think that I have just about run out of tape here.

[End of Interview]