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Interviewee: Cynthia Bouchard

Interviewer: Gladys Peterson

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Gladys Peterson: I'm speaking today to Mrs. Cynthia Bouchard. Our main topic will be the depression of the 1930s. Mrs. Bouchard, I understand that you lived in Bonner during the Depression.

Cynthia Bouchard: Yes, I think I was in a very lucky place to be in the Depression. I don't remember feeling that bad about things out there. But I know there were people who were in real depression at the time. But my husband worked there. He'd worked there about three years when it started, and he was a truck driver and shipper. So he was a monthly man. But when it really got bad, Mr. Lubrecht was in charge at the ACM [Anaconda Copper Mining Company], and he was a very wonderful man to be in charge. Because they were working six days a week, and instead of letting anyone go, he divided the time so that each man would work three days a week and that at least they would have some money coming in. He also let the rent on the houses go until some future date, because he figured that they wouldn't lose that much on it by letting everyone, that needed to, have their rent for something else besides for the house.

GP: Now you're speaking of the houses right in the town of Bonner?

CB: Well, anyone that worked the ACM, then they owned quite a bit of the housing round through the area.

GP: In Milltown too.

CB: Yes.

GP: What about in West Riverside?

CB: If it was a personal...they were renting from personal people other than through the ACM, then they had to go ahead and pay the rent. But it was the only ones that the Anaconda Company owned. And he also provided a space down back of the mill where there was a lot of ground absolutely going to waste. So he had it all plowed up and marked into plots, and he provided everyone that wanted it with garden space. My boys weren't very big, but they remember planting potatoes out there and hoeing and weeding and everything. Everyone could grow what they wanted. And Joe grew potatoes and onions and carrots.

GP: Could we back up a little bit. When did you move to Bonner?

CB: Well, I was married and moved to Bonner in 1924.

GP: Are you a native Montanan?

CB: Yes. I was born in Toston, Montana, and other than two years I've been in Montana all my life. They should call me native.

GP: Yes. Was your husband a Montanan also?

CB: Yes. He was born in Frenchtown. And he ranched in the eastern part of the state for about four years, and then went in to the service the First World War. He came back, and he went on to the ACM and asked for a job. Just as it happened they needed a truck driver, and he says, "Oh, I know all about driving trucks, and driven trucks for years." So they hired him, and he had to turn around and ask the gardener how to start the big white truck he was to drive. He asked the gardener how to start it because he wasn't really that well qualified. But after he got the truck started, then he drove truck for all the time we lived there. He used to haul through the camps—haul supplies and things to the camps above Bonner. He was also a chauffeur for Mr. Lubrecht and the people there that wanted to go any place, he was chauffeur for them. And he drove truck all the time we were there, all over—any place they needed supplies or anything.

GP: Now were you living right in Bonner?

CB: Yes. House number five in Bonner. [laughs]

GP: How did you manage to live in a house in Bonner? There were, what, only 40 houses, 50 houses there? Who got to live in those houses?

CB: Well, kind of first-come, first-serve basis. As one was vacated, you were next on the list, and you got to move in. We had a very small house when we were first married, and we didn't have a bathroom or any facilities that we were...about three years later, we got to move into a house with a bathroom, which made it much easier. We had a pretty good-sized yard. They put in yards after we were there. We had a pretty good-sized yard. The children went to Bonner school. Had two families, the first two, and then after nine years I had two more boys. And we had children at school almost all the time we lived in Bonner.

Like I said, we didn't realize there was that much depression out there because it seemed like we sort of helped one another. Our pleasures were simple. We didn't require any large amount of money for pleasure. I think our biggest pleasure, we'd all get in the car and drive down to Missoula and watch the people on the streets. Once in a while, we'd have money enough to go to a show. Joe used to gather up old batteries and iron and all kinds of things, and sell them for a little extra money. Like I said, I don't feel that we suffered. There were many people who did suffer. But no one that way seemed to suffer very much. If they were having a hard time

making it, they could charge their groceries at the company store. All they had to do was come forth and say something, and they were sort of taken care of.

GP: Now, you mean if they were employed by ACM they could charge their groceries.

CB: Yes, and most everyone that lived out here were employees of the Anaconda Company and worked in the mills or lumber yards there.

GP: Now did Anaconda own the other mill, Western Lumber at that time?

CB: No, not at that time. When there was a Western Lumber Company. They were separate but after a while [unintelligible] to the Anaconda Company.

GP: I just wondered if you knew what was going on with the other lumber company? Were they doing the same thing with their employees?

CB: I just don't remember. I don't know if they were or not. I'm sure they were assisting all they could for their employees, trying to take care of them. But I don't know if they did like Mr. Lubrecht. I don't believe they cut it down to three days a week for everyone. I'm not sure of that. I just don't know. I know anything he was in charge of he just saw to it that everyone had a little something to go on. We sort of divided with one another, and you didn't throw anything away. My husband used to wear the blue and white striped overalls when he was driving truck. When he was through with them, had the front all worn out, I took the back part and made little overalls for my kids. Things were so, compared to now, were so reasonably priced. We could get bread for 10 cents a loaf, and many of us made our own bread. At Christmastime, the Anaconda Company gave us all a big sack of flour and a big box of chocolates. They'd help out quite a bit.

GP: Now those gardens you were talking about, were those the community gardens, were they still operating there on the mill property?

CB: I don't believe they are anymore, but they were operating for a long time.

GP: But I mean those were the gardens you were talking about.

CB: Yes. The community gardens there in the back of the mill. There was just a lot of ground in there that wasn't being used, and he just had it all plowed up and marked off into little sections. Not all that big, but by planting them close together you could grow quite a bit of things. I know one [unintelligible] we planted a lot of tomatoes. We'd kind of switch groceries. Somebody want tomatoes, we'd give them a few onions and we'd trade off. Like I say, we don't have bad memories like some people do. [unintelligible sentence].

GP: Were you active in either of the churches out there?

CB: Yes, we belong to the Catholic Church. The boys were raised Catholic, all of them. We used to put on big dinners to try to raise a little money. Always at Thanksgiving time. Our first one, we had about 750 customers, and we didn't believe we were going to have that many but we managed to feed everyone. When the boys got a little older, high school age, that's kind of when the Depression was wearing off, but in the church basements, we used to have entertainment for them. They could dance. Many card parties, we had a lot of card parties for people to come to.

GP: Was that money for use in the church, or was it to go towards needy people?

CB: Well, part of it, but mostly they held those to kind of help the children. There wasn't all that much entertainment. They used to have their bible classes, catechism classes down there. But then they also, all the mother and fathers would get together and we'd chaperone down there—take our turn—and fix lunch for them. Rather than to have them someplace else, we had them go down and have their parties and dancing parties and everything.

GP: Did they have the C.Y.O.?

CB: Yes.

GP: I remember that. They had that in Chicago.

CB: Catholic Youth Organization?

GP: Yes. I remember that.

CB: I don't remember other...Lutheran churches—many of them belonged to the Lutheran church, but they were all invited to whichever was having anything going on. Everyone was invited. In the school, there weren't all that many functions because there wasn't the money to go ahead with them in the school. But they had their parties too and entertainments and always something at Christmas time. They didn't have the graduations like they do now. Graduation was just...you sort of went and got your report card, and the fact that you passed. They'd have a picnic if possible. Everybody would get busy and send food, and they'd all go someplace and have an eight grade picnic. But no graduation ceremony like they do now. They always had their musical programs and I think all of my kids sang in them. Like I say, I don't believe there was too much...we didn't suffer too much. My husband worked of a month, so he didn't...we paid our rent. He had 30 days, he would pay by the month. We were expected to go ahead and pay our rent and take care of things. But we lost the car during the Depression. We bought it, but the people we bought it from didn't have very much faith in whether we could pay for it or not. So we did lose our car, and we were afoot for a long time. But we finally got back on our feet and could get a car.

GP: Well, they had street cars out there at the time, or were they busses?

CB: Yes. Street cars, thank goodness. I could remember we could give our kids a quarter, and they could go to town on a street car. They had passes...they'd have a quarter for a hamburger and a coke. They'd have a big evening. Of course, they could go to the ball games. They'd go to the ball games, basketball games and they would just have a large evening on a quarter. We didn't need much, and we'd go to town if Joe and I wanted to celebrate. We'd have a maybe a dollar and a half extra left over, and we'd go to town on a street car and go to the movie and home again on a dollar and a half. [laughs] Money left over.

GP: You wouldn't happen to remember who some of your favorite stars were of those days, would you?

CB: No, I was never very good at remembering the names of stars that played in the movie. We always enjoyed it, and then we had the radio...oh no, we had a phonograph first. I think Lubrecht had one, and it then wasn't long until we had a phonograph. Of course, we saved our pennies to get records, different records, and we enjoyed that. The children finally took the phonograph up to the big hall there in Bonner, and they'd go up and dance up there. That's why my phonograph is worn out, up at the hall in in Bonner.

GP: Was this the white...the old white school house there was called the Bonner Hall?

CB: Yes. That was, I guess, their old school house.

GP: Yes, it was.

CB: But they afterward had it for community gatherings and things, and that's where the kids used to go for their dances or parties. Our phonograph went along with them.

I don't remember too much more...we always bought our wood from the ACM. Everybody had a wood stove, of course. If you could buy a load of [unintelligible] blocks for 75 cents and a load of large wood for the heater for two dollars, and they delivered it right out to your door.

[unintelligible]

GP: Do you remember when Mr. Lubrecht put the men back on more than three days a week?

CB: I think they must have been three days for at least a year, and it may have been longer. I just don't remember how long. Joe wasn't on three days a week, so I just don't remember how long. But he kept them on that schedule until they kind of could get back on their feet—the ACM, I mean—and could get to selling more lumber. Of course, they, at that time, were keeping the mines in Anaconda and Butte...they were keeping them going with [unintelligible] and lumber that they needed for their mines. So that's really why they kept on working was

principally for the mines. They weren't selling that much lumber so the men were kept on until they did start selling lumber; otherwise, it went to the mines.

GP: And I suppose that started when World War Two was approaching?

CB: Yes, when they could kind of build up their business more. Then they'd be put on maybe four days and they divided up that way and extended on. Finally they were back on there, but I don't remember how long it was.

GP: Did your boys work for ACM at all?

CB: The older two didn't because when they were old enough to work in the mill, they were going to war. The minute they turned 17 they both thought they had to go war. So that's where they did. The second two...my older of the second two—the big green lawn there by the baseball diamond, that was his lawn, and he took care of that. He was only 16. He couldn't work in the mill, but he took care of the lawn. The older two, when they were growing up and they weren't very big, they shoveled snow and done lawns and they'd have a car wash. People out of the kindness of their heart would come and have their car washed and taken care of. But they were small and that was during the Depression. Four o'clock in the morning, they'd get out of bed and take their little homemade shovels and go clean walks for everyone in Bonner. Mr. Willis Ross (?) was one of their customers, and he used to tell families, he says, "When I get up and go to the mill, I don't want my walk covered with snow." So if it snowed a quarter of an inch, Sammy was right down there taking the snow off of his walk. But they never did work in the mills. They couldn't do that until they were 18, and they were gone when they were 18. And when they came back, neither one of them went to work at the mill. I think they might have for just maybe two or three months, but not any longer than that. They found other jobs. My youngest, he never did work in the mill. Mike worked on the lawns, and that was all. So none of the boys ever really worked in the mill.

GP: I wonder if you could tell us more about your boys because I know that some of them...a couple of them stayed in the military, didn't they?

CB: Yes.

GP: Let's start with your oldest boy. What was his name?

CB: Joe. We always called him Sammy, and a lot of the people will remember him as Sammy. He went in the day he was 17. He just couldn't contain it any longer. And he was in for 32 years in the service.

GP: In the Navy?

CB: Yes. He didn't think there was any other branch in the service but the Navy. And then the number two son, Pat, went in when he was 17. Of course, he was 17 in February and had to wait until he graduated. He went in the Navy. He was in for two years, and overseas part of that time. He had gone to school too before he went out to sea. He went to school and became an electrician. Electrician's maid I believe they called them. He worked for the ship doing that. When my second two came around, the oldest one went to college for two and a half years after he graduated. Then he went to the Navy and became a flyer. Our oldest boys were both in Vietnam just about the same time they passed one another. Mike was going over and Joe was coming home. My youngest went to the Air Force Academy, and when he graduated he was in the Air Force. He also became a flyer. He flew a big old C-124, a cargo plane. He hauled big guns and everything and things like that—the larger equipment—into Vietnam. When he came home from overseas, he went into flying helicopters. They no longer used the big C-124s anymore so he was flying helicopters until...he just retired the first of August. While he was in Wyoming, at Warren Air Force Base, he started rescue work. His crew all had to learn to become...I guess, what would you call them? Emergency men. He went to visit all the hospital, and told them what they were starting there at Warren. All his crew had to learn to take care of their patients, and they were on call at all times for rescue work there at the hospitals and on the roads and everything. That was his project. I bet he's still standing down there wondering if they're taking good care of everybody. [laughs] He retired the first of August.

GP: Well, I certainly appreciate the information you've given us.

CB: Well it wasn't much but—

GP: It all adds up.

CB: It all adds up, I guess.

GP: Because what we're trying to do is get the views of people who were in different locations and different walks of life. So it's all appreciated. Thank you very much.

CB: Oh yes, you're very welcome for what little I could do.

[Break in audio]

GP: Mrs. Bouchard, I've thought of two or three other things that perhaps you could answer. One is the public libraries out there. Did you have any contact with the library that was in Bonner or the one in Milltown?

CB: I never worked in the library, but the boys would go and get their books at the library. They had it in the big old Margaret Hotel for a while, they had their library there. Wilda Johnson (?) had it for a long time, she was librarian. And they'd get their books and things down there. It was well used. I know they were almost required to go and get books.

GP: My next question was going to be about the Margaret Hotel. It was such a beautiful place, I was wondering if you had any contact with it at all.

CB: Just my boys, there was a very dear friend who lived at the Margaret Hotel. They were back and forth and up there at his place. But that is about all the contact we had with [unintelligible]. They finally closed it and tore it down. They no longer needed it. It used to be quite...many of the officials lived there. They served meals, had their cook and housekeepers and things, they served meals to the people there, and rented out the rooms. But they finally had no further use for it so they...it was torn down.

GP: Another thing regarding the Depression. Do you remember whether many women from that area were working at the time?

CB: You mean in the mill?

GP: Yes, or were they coming into Missoula? Were they working at all?

CB: No, very few of the women worked. I don't believe there was any of them that taught at the school. There were women who worked in the mill in the office at the ACM, but they weren't Bonner women, they came up to the town. Later on I think a couple of them did stay at the Margaret Hotel, but they were not residents of Bonner.

GP: It would be interesting to know whether they were married or not. Do you remember anything about that?

CB: I know there was one that was not married. Right now, I can't recall her name, I know it was Montana something.

GP: Well, what I was wondering is whether or not there was any feeling about married women being employed and possibly taking jobs from men.

CB: I feel that if there were very many working, there probably would have been some feeling against them because the men were having to hard times getting work. But I'm not sure that the women that worked in the office were there during the Depression, I think they came afterwards. Because [unintelligible] worked in the office, there were many...all of the men that worked in the office were men that worked in the office.

GP: Not very many women around?

CB: No. I can only remember two women that ever worked in the office, and I'm sure that was after the Depression.

GP: I see. Okay, well thanks again.

[End of Interview]