

Maureen and Mike

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**Oral History Number: 396-073**

**Interviewee: Paul T. Ringling**

**Interviewer: Bob Brown**

**Date of Interview: May 30, 2013**

**Project: Bob Brown Oral History Project**

Bob Brown: This is Bob Brown. I am interviewing Paul Ringling on May 30, 2013, in Helena, Montana. Paul, where and when were you born?

Paul Ringling: I was born in New York City, that'd be April 21, 1920.

BB: Who were your parents and what was their occupation?

PR: My father's name was Richard, Richard T. Ringling. His occupation was at that time starting to ranch in Montana and was the son of one of the original Ringling Brothers, Alf T. Ringling, that founded the circus.

BB: Now tell me about that, tell me about the founding of the circus.

PR: The circus – the Ringling Brothers, the five brothers started their circus in 1884 at Baraboo, Wisconsin.

BB: And they traveled around the country, they had a big top tent and elephants and that sort of thing?

PR: Well when they first started in 1884 there were the brothers and four or five performers. They traveled, not by railroad then, by wagon-hired teams from farmers around Wisconsin, Iowa, and Minnesota – in that territory. They operated, and what in the vernacular of the circus you would call a 'mud show,' because they traveled around the country with teams. They didn't go on the railroad until 1889. So four years and then on the off part of the season they worked. Their father was a harness maker and they all knew how to trim wagon and buggies. They worked in the wintertime and then part of the time in the winter they had where they played in halls, call shows type things. Sang, danced, and performed themselves.

BB: So it wasn't so much what we would think of as a circus to begin with?

PR: Well it was a circus, but it was a circus that traveled – but with horses.

BB: Yes.

PR: And when they first started, they didn't have all the animals that they had later.

BB: It's a troupe of entertainers it sounds like.

PR: Yes, that's correct.

BB: So was there acting and singing and that sort of thing in their family that attracted them to that business?

PR: Yes, they all acted and sang and played instruments. My grandfather was quite an accomplished musician on the violin and my uncle Charles Ringling was a very excellent saxophone player.

BB: And they were a part of the original five, your grandfather was?

PR: Yes.

BB: Now what's the connection to P.T. Barnum? Because I think of the Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey Circus as though they must have merged or something, explain that.

PR: The Ringling Brothers bought out from James Bailey's estate. The Ringling Brothers bought the Barnum and Bailey, I'm sorry, yes, bought the Barnum and Bailey Circus in 1907. They operated the circus separate from Ringling Brothers until 1919, when they combined them into what you know as Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey.

BB: Did your grandfather have any connection to P.T. Barnum or was he dead by then?

PR: Barnum at that time had died.

BB: I see, and so his interest in the circus have been taken over by Bailey?

PR: Yes.

BB: And then your family bought the circus from Bailey. Was there anything left over from – Phineas T. Barnum of course is a well-known character in American history. I think he's the guy that said there was a sucker born every minute [laughs].

PR: [laughs] Well that's what he's quoted as saying. Then my grandfather and my uncle John Ringling were the brothers. I'll back up a little bit. The Ringling Brothers were a partnership – the brothers. They were a partnership that never had a partnership agreement and had a joint bank account. Anyway, the brothers – they're in the business, the brothers, decided that my grandfather and John Ringling, my uncle, would go to Bridgeport, Connecticut, and operate the Barnum & Bailey Circus, which they did. My grandmother charged my grandfather with desertion and divorced him.

BB: Now your grandfather's first name was?

PR: Alf, A-L-F.

BB: Okay.

PR: Middle initial T for Theodore.

BB: And his wife divorced him?

PR: Yes, charged him with desertion.

BB: [laughs] I see, for going to Connecticut?

PR: Yes.

BB: And where did they live at the time?

PR: Baraboo, Wisconsin.

BB: Now what was the connection to Montana?

PR: Well my uncle John Ringling came to Meagher County, White Sulphur Springs, about at the same time that the Milwaukee Railroad was built. What he actually did, he speculated in land in Meagher County. White Sulphur Springs is the county seat. My father came there to do some business and look at his uncle's property and that's where he met my mother.

BB: And about when was this?

PR: My mother and father were married in White Sulphur Springs in 1918, but John Ringling would have come there about 1908.

BB: And what was the attraction? Was it just that he read or something that there was a good opportunity to buy land in that area?

PR: Well my uncle, this is John Ringling now we're speaking about, he speculated in land in Montana, in Oklahoma, in Missouri, in Florida. The land that he bought in Oklahoma, but what he was interested in was coal. But the coal never amounted to anything, but they found oil all over it. And that's when he became quite a wealthy man, from this oil income that he had. And there's a little town, Ringling, also in Oklahoma.

BB: Oh, there's a Ringling, Montana, isn't there?

PR: Yes, well that's south of White Sulphur Springs. Between White Sulphur Springs and Wilsall.

BB: So you're dad, whose first name was?

PR: Richard.

BB: Richard, and your mother?

PR: My mother was born and raised in White Sulphur Springs.

BB: And what was her name?

PR: Aubrey, and not Audrey, but Aubrey. A-U-B-R-E-Y. Her father wanted a son, of course, but had a daughter. But he already had the name picked, so he just named her Aubrey.

BB: And the maiden name?

PR: Black.

BB: Okay, and that was a family established in Montana?

PR: Yes, my grandparents on my mother's side came from Kentucky. They came to Montana and his uncle was Preston Leslie, the last territorial governor of Montana. They stopped to see his uncle in Helena, where we are right now.

BB: Now this is Richard who stopped to see his uncle?

PR: No.

BB: Oh excuse me, but Black, your mother's father?

PR: Yes. My grandfather Black, his first name was Powell. Powell Black.

BB: I got you, okay. And he was the nephew of Preston Leslie?

PR: Yes. And his uncle, Preston Leslie, told him that the coming town in Montana was White Sulphur Springs. My grandfather was an attorney, so he went to White Sulphur Springs and had a law practice there.

BB: Now so your side of the family also invested in land, which he didn't strike any oil?

PR: Well, my father invested in land and he became a rancher, but also owned one-third of the circus.

BB: Okay, and so he remained in the circus business as well as in the ranching business in White Sulphur?

PR: Yes.

BB: How long did he remain in the circus business before the circus closed?

PR: Well, my father died when he was 36. I was only 11 years old when my father died. So that one-third interest in the circus then went to my mother. When I graduated from high school, I was 17 and went to work on the circus.

BB: What did you do?

PR: The first two years, and I say years, but it's actually seasons, because the circus operated from April until about November. The first two years I worked in the ticket department. The second two years I worked within the layout and setting up the circus. We rode, or I rode, what we called a squadron. The circus moved in four sections and the squadron was the first section. Our normal time to get up was 3:30 in the morning, but by 6:00 you were served breakfast. By 10, we were through. I mean, we were still obviously employees, but our job is moving. By 10 in the morning we were pretty well through. In the last year that I worked on the circus, 1941, I checked outdoor advertising. So I was about two weeks, 10 days to two weeks, ahead of the circus. The outdoor advertising was the one sheets in the stores, the billboards. That was the first year that we had ads on the Railway Express trucks that are no longer in existence. Anyway that was my job in 1941, checked outdoor advertising.

BB: Then I presume you went into the military?

PR: In 1942.

BB: And what became of the circus? Was it sold?

PR: Well the circus still was in the family and my mother sold her interest in the circus in, I have to come up with the right year. She sold her interest in about '49.

BB: I see. How long after that did the circus remain in existence, do you know?

PR: Well the circus is still in existence, but it's no longer owned by any of my family. It's actually still operating.

BB: Out of Baraboo, Wisconsin?

PR: No, no. Now out of Florida. For years it was Sarasota, Florida, but now it's down in Venice, in Florida.

BB: So you grew up in and around White Sulphur Springs?

PR: Yes.

BB: And you went away to the military, you were 21 years old or 22 years old when you went into the army?

PR: I was first in the Army Signal Corps and then the Air Corps.

BB: Where were you stationed?

PR: In the United States, I of course went to the base camp down in California. Then I went to radio school and living in a hotel in Kansas City. Went straight from there to North Africa.

BB: I see, and you were in the regular Army or in the Army Air Corps?

PR: I was first in the Army Signal Corps and then later the Air Corps.

BB: Yes. My dad was in North Africa in the Army Air Corps too.

PR: It wasn't Army Air Corps, it was Air Corps.

BB: Oh I see, okay.

PR: It was the Army Signal Corps, but the Air Corps was a separate branch. Then later I was in Italy.

BB: Yes, my dad was too. For a while he was attached to the British Eighth Army, I think, when they were in North Africa.

PR: When the unit I was in, we were totally with the British. One hundred percent with the British, our orders came from Cheadle outside of London.

BB: Do you remember in Italy, were you at Puglia?

PR: Yes I was at Puglia, but most of the time I was in Italy it was at Bari on the Adriatic. It was about 30 miles from Bari.

BB: Okay, alright. Well I think you and my dad might have shared rations together. It sounds like you followed the same pattern pretty much in World War II. So you returned from the

war, and you went back to the ranch at White Sulphur Springs or did you go to college?

PR: I went to school on a GI bill. Then my wife and I, we were married in 1940, so we'd been married going on two years when I went into the service. When I came home, and my wife had gone to the Butte Business College when I went into the service and then she worked all the time during the [war]. When I came home, she quit her job. We rented a cabin and went over to Lake McDonald and got reacquainted. Then later I went to school on the GI bill.

BB: At Montana State or?

PR Yes.

BB: In Bozeman?

PR: At Bozeman.

BB: And I assumed majored in some range management?

PR: Right, I took all ag courses, but I never graduated. I went back – my mother was having problems. I did plan to go back on the circus and then there was family feuds going on. Pardon my French, but I said the hell with it and I went back to the ranch. My mother was having problems on the ranch.

BB: So you took over the management of the ranch?

PR: Yes.

BB: Now Paul, you got into politics in 1952, so you hadn't been back on the ranch very long when that happened.

PR: Right.

BB: What motivated that?

PR: I don't think I can give you a good answer. I think I disagreed probably with our represent – then, you understand, that's the old Constitution.

BB: Yes, 1889 Constitution.

PR: Yes.

BB: You had one representative for all of Meagher County.



PR: Well, every county in Montana —

BB: Had at least one.

PR: Yes, and every county had a senator. Yellowstone County, Silver Bow County, up at Great Falls — Cascade County, Missoula. Not sure, but anyway Yellowstone County had about five in the House. Silver Bow County had six, I think, but most of all the counties had one of each.

BB: So you had a disagreement with the —?

PR: I think probably I didn't think that our representative then was representing maybe the county.

BB: Who was he?

PR: His last name was [Orville] Rostad.

BB: Rostad, okay, that's an old political family in the central part of the state.

PR: Oh, yes.

BB: In fact, I served with Carl Rostad.

PR: Well Carl was his brother. Carl and I were really good personal friends. Carl was a county commissioner and we used to go together to meetings. Carl and I were good friends, but it was his brother that I defeated.

BB: [laughs] Do you remember anything about the issue or anything that was involved?

PR: No. Of course I had to decide — if you're going to be in politics you have to decide what you are.

BB: Well, you anticipated my next question.

PR: I think I became a Democrat because I disagreed with Democrats less than I disagreed with what the Republicans said. Of course from Meagher County, White Sulphur Springs. I think, now you can check this, but I think when I was later in the Senate I think I'm the only Democrat senator from that County from about 1920 until right now.

BB: Yes, it's a pretty heavily Republican part of the state that's for sure. So there was a philosophical difference between the two parties at that time and you agreed with the Democrats a little more than you agreed with the Republicans, or you disagreed with them a little bit less. Explain how you saw the difference in the two parties then?

PR: Well, then you must remember that the Anaconda Company and Montana Power or, forget about Montana power. Between the two of them, they ran Montana. Especially with the Anaconda Company. They gave just enough slack that the state could operate, but the one thing that they were interested in was education. I have to give them credit for that. So they funded the university system. They were gonna hold the money back maybe on other things, but they had funded the university system. I say they, we, the legislators.

BB: How did they do that? How did they exercise control over the legislature?

PR: They just controlled enough legislators, they didn't obviously control all of them, but they controlled a majority.

BB: How?

PR: When you paid your power bill, when you paid your Montana Power bill, you could go, instead of mailing in your money, you paid your bill at a local grocery store or a drugstore or something they and then they had a large ad in every weekly paper, every week. There was a phosphate ad or something from the Anaconda Company, so they subsidized the papers.

BB: The little weekly newspapers?

PR: The weekly newspapers. They subsidize the businesses and a business in the town where everybody went to buy their drugs or their groceries or something like that. They entertained here in Helena, and then you remember those days, the legislature met for 60 days and every day counted.

BB: Yes, right. Now Paul, explain again how if you received your Montana Power bill in the mail and then you said you could go to a grocery store?

PR: Yes and pay your bill.

BB: How does that work?

PR: Well you just walked in, paid your bill right —

BB: Paid it to the grocer?

PR: Pardon me?

BB: Paid the bill to the grocer?

PR: No. You paid the bill to the Montana Power, but you gave the check or your cash or however you paid it to the grocer. Of course, the grocer transferred it.

BB: So how did that benefit the grocer?

PR: Well they probably got a percentage. I don't know that, but they obviously were—.

BB: Right. So what this was, was a kind of a big organized operation where people in the grocery business, people in the newspaper business, maybe other small business people were all sort of in a way a part of the big Anaconda Company-Montana Power Company business operation.

PR: That's correct. Well, and every little town had a—we'll say they had a Rotary Club, so they subsidized the Rotary Club. If you worked for the Montana Power for instance, you had to belong to the Rotary Club. You were a member and active in that, that was part of your job.

BB: And the Rotary Club was influential in those little communities.

PR: Right.

BB: So explain the connection between the Anaconda Company and the Montana Power Company.

PR: Well they worked together up here in the legislature, but the Anaconda Company—the room was 621 in the Placer [Hotel], every afternoon they had drinks and snacks and entertained the legislators. The Montana Power had a separate room and they didn't do as much of that, but mostly they were there. But they worked together during the session.

BB: So the Montana Power Company's room might have been where they did research and that was more of an office, but the Anaconda company's room 621 was what's called a watering hole or?

PR: The water hole, yes.

BB: And were there other water holes?

PR: I think the railroads had one, but the main one was Anaconda Company.

BB: Describe it.

PR: There was a room upstairs in the Placer, well 621 that was the room. If someone had a birthday or there was something then they had a little special party. Well now I obviously I've been to the 621, but I wasn't a regular there. But when there was a special thing, then I would

go. I remember one time when we walked in, some of us Democrats, and there was a Republican legislator says, "What're those Democrats doing in a Republican Club?" And I remember the Anaconda guy just chewed him out. He says, "This is not a Republican Club!"

BB: But Paul when you got interested in politics, to get back to my original question, it was because you felt that the Republicans – I think you just said it, were closer to this big business combination that controlled Montana politics than the Democrats were. Would you say though that there were still some Democrats that were closely involved with the Anaconda Company and a part of their—?

PR: Oh yes. Especially the delegates from Silver Bow County, from Cascade County. That first session when I was in the Legislature 1953, there were 26 of us Democrats that voted together some time. And then some you'd have a standing vote, you know if you were for or against whatever. Well the group from where I sat, right in front of us, was a group from Silver Bow. Well they'd be standing up, we'd be sitting down.

BB: And that might involve votes that the Anaconda Company or the Montana Power Company had an interest in?

PR: Yes, right.

BB: You remember names?

PR: Well sure, and you realize you're talking to an old guy. Well, sometimes by day after tomorrow I'll tell you what the answer was. Yes, old Leo Graybill was minority leader.

BB: And he was a Democrat from Great Falls?

PR: Yes. Bob Durkee from Hill County was a Democrat. Bob and I were seatmates.

BB: But before, tell me a little bit about Leo? Was he a part of your 26 group?

PR: Yes, oh, yes. Did you know Leo?

BB: Well if we're talking about the same guy, he was the chairman of the Constitutional Convention?

PR: No, that was his son.

BB: I see, okay.

PR: There were two – they had the same name. Leo was an attorney and always dressed up, you know the real dressed, and particular to follow the rules, the dignity of the legislature. He was pretty well oriented around that type. Then in '55 he was the speaker [of the House].

BB: And Bob Durkee? I knew from Havre.

PR: Bob was from Hill County, from Havre.

BB: He was a lobbyist for the Tavern Keepers Association when I was elected.

PR: Yes, but that was later. Bob and I were seatmates and good friends during the legislature.

BB: And he was part of your group?

PR: Yes.

BB: Who —?

PR: Fred Barrett from Liberty County.

BB: Who I also knew.

PR: Yes, Fred was part of that group.

BB: His father-in-law, I think, was Leonard Plank, who was also a senator from up in that country sometime back in the '20's and '30's.

PR: Yes.

BB: I interviewed him before I was doing these recorded interviews, but that was many years ago. It was a wonderful interview. Who do you remember from the Butte-Anaconda delegation?

PR: Well, let me think.

BB: Someone who might stand out in your memory as particularly close to the Anaconda Company?

PR: I'm trying to come up with the names now. Well, right now I have to dodge that question because I can't come up with those names. Regardless, I knew them all.

BB: Yes, but you don't remember there was a particular leader of their delegation?

PR: Yes, an attorney that was from Butte and that was in the Senate. I would say be their leader, but darn it, right now I can't think of it. I just can't come up with that name.

BB: Okay. Let me see here. When you got to the the Montana Legislature in 1953, do you remember any first impressions? Is there a memory that stands out in your mind?

PR: What I can remember is you didn't hardly know how to get in and out the doors, you know. Pretty darn green when you first went to the legislature. I sat and listened and tried to learn what was going on and I learned a lot by watching, and I had his name right and now I can't – I'll think of it, but anyway. On the Republican side was a House member from down in, I think his home—Carbon County.

BB: George O'Connor?

PR: George O'Connor. Well I'll tell you, there's George O'Connor really knew that the Montana House had terrible rules for a legislative body. Their rules were the Robert's Rules of Order, which are terrible for a legislative thing. George knew those rules and I watched him, because I said he pitched us into the gaboons about four times a day. You know, then by your seat was a gaboon, so you'd want him talking about bringing —

BB: A spittoon?

PR: Yes, a spittoon. I watched George and you knew you need to know the rules, which you also could do anything if you could get away with. I learned that from George O'Connor just by watching him. We knew each other and we weren't unfriendly, but we weren't really friends either. Ori Armstrong was another one.

BB: From Kalispell? Was he the speaker at that time? He was speaker once.

PR: No, but he wasn't the speaker then. But he was real active in his party.

BB: What do you remember about him?

PR: I kind of liked Ori, and I remember at the end of the '53 session, this you probably won't believe, Ori said we didn't do too badly and we balanced the state budget for 23 million dollars.

BB: Wow.

PR: Can you believe that?

BB: Can you believe that now, yes. Well he was a very prominent citizen in Kalispell when I was a little kid. Getting back to George O'Connor, do you know what became of him?

PR: Yes, later he went to work for the Montana Power and I think he worked there until he retired.

BB: And I believe he was the CEO wasn't he? The chief executive officer?

PR: He worked his way up.

BB: He was high up in the Montana Power Company anyways. [He was the president.]

PR: Yes, right.

BB: So that tends to underscore your connection between the prominent politicians in Montana and the Montana Power Company and the Anaconda Company. Do you remember anything about Ori Armstrong, I mean other than the—?

PR: No.

BB: George O'Connor, it's fairly well-known, had a wonderful mastery of the rules.

PR: Oh yes. Ori was a leader in his party, but I don't remember some exceptional things. Those fellows, they worked kind of behind the scenes.

BB: Yes. Now Paul, I interviewed a fellow, again it wasn't a recorded interview, by the name of Bill Kirkpatrick. Bill Kirkpatrick was the western general counsel for the Anaconda Company, I believe their lead lobbyist. At least in Montana and maybe in other parts of the country too, because I think they had holdings in Arizona as well.

PR: Yes.

BB: He told me about the watering hole, because he was there in 1953 and 1955. So I think he was kind of the main guy in terms of their lobbying operation. He told me that typically that their watering hole would be open for a couple hours, I guess. I don't know at the end of the legislative day?

PR: Well, they would be open at least for two hours, we'll say from 5 to 7 or maybe 4:30 to 7:30 or something, yes. They had snacks, but mostly drinks and conversation. Then when there would be a birthday party or something special, then they'd have a little extras.

BB: I've heard stories that they sometimes had heavy hors d'oeuvres like maybe a baron of beef or something like that.

PR: At the time when I was there, I don't remember ever being there when there was a baron of beef, but there could have been.

BB: The story was that there were some guys who were kind of poor, who maybe basically had their evening meal there sometimes.

PR: There was some. That one legislator from Jordan, east of Jordan, I think he just lived on free food.

BB: Do you remember who that was?

PR: Yes. John McDonald was in the House and I'll think of his name before —

BB: Was it Speer?

PR: No, Junior Speer was down —

BB: Down toward Hardin, I think.

PR: Yes, I'm trying to come up with that county name down there.

BB: Probably Bighorn.

PR: Yes, it would have been Bighorn County. That was Junior Speer, but Junior, he could pay his way anywhere.

BB: Sure, yes. So and it wasn't McDonald either who was a Democrat?

PR: John was a Democrat and the other one was a Republican from Jordan.

BB: The guy that practically lived off the watering hole was a Republican from Jordan?

PR: Yes, but he seldom was in the water hole, but you know there were free lunches and things around Helena. Some of the companies now have a party or a dinner; he made all of those.

BB: When I was in legislature, we referred the guys like that as "Park Bears." They were like a park bear, you know, they were begging for goodies all the time and that sort of thing. Well, to get back to my comment about Bill Kirkpatrick, Bill said that when the watering hole closed down—seven o'clock, or seven-thirty, or whenever that was—sometime a short time afterward some of the key legislators, according to him from both parties and from both chambers, sat down there in that room or in a room right close by. They didn't do this every day, he said, but they did it fairly frequently during the legislative session. They just talked about the status of bills in the legislature and that sort of thing. I said, "Well, Bill, obviously you were talking about bills that you had an interest in that you wanted to see passed or you wanted to see the killed." He said that was pretty much the case, we just kind of shared



information generally. I said "And so the Anaconda company lobbyist was in the room?" And he said, "Yeah, sometimes more than one, maybe even several, but business-interest lobbyists." I said, "Did you ever decide that a particular bill should die?" He said, "Sure, yes. We talked about the ones we didn't like." I said, "And you talked about the ones you wanted to have passed?" He said, "Certainly." I said, "Well in the time that you were there, in 1953 and 1955, when your group decided to kill a bill or when your group decided to pass a bill, did you ever fail in that?" He said, "Never once, Robert, never once." Does that add up to you? Had you ever heard of the little group? He said he didn't think it was unknown and he said he thought some legislators referred to it as "The School."

PR: Well, we knew, yes. They had the control and some of the legislators they never used, unless they absolutely needed them. Well in the '59 session in the Senate, I personally and some of the rest of them, we were real good friends with the senator from Silver Bow County, who didn't pretend to be anything else – he was a company man. He befriended all of us. He would carry bills for us that we didn't want our name on. If you didn't want to speak for whatever political reason, he would. We all owed him a favor. Well one day, he collected the favors. There were two ladies up on Berkeley Pit that wouldn't sell their home, two ladies. The Anaconda Company had a bill in that they could condemn, that's the only way they could get it. Well then is when he asked us all for the favor.

BB: That was it, yes. Because the government can condemn property in the public interest, but there was a bill before the legislature that gave a private corporation the power to condemn this private property. I suppose their position was they couldn't expand the Berkeley Pit as long as these people held out.

PR: Right.

BB: So they probably argue that hundreds of jobs depend on our ability to do this and we're giving them a fair price and they're just holding us up and that sort of thing.

PR: The other thing he told us, he told us the votes that the Anaconda Company had in the Senate, and he told us the number, he was exactly right. We could not, I'm talking about us, a little group of us Democrats, we could not figure out who those people [were]. We knew some of them obviously, now some of these names. Now Bob, am I going to tell you the name and then the name will go in this record?

BB: Well it should if you know it.

PR: Well one of them is Dave James.

BB: Up at Liberty County?

PR: Yes.

BB: And he was the leader of—?

PR: He was the majority leader in the Senate. He's the one Democrat, well not the only one, but he really stabbed me in the back. I just didn't care much for Dave James, not at all. Anyway, I was chairman in '59 of the Committee on Committees.

BB: Which is the committee in the State Senate that appoints all the other committees. Very important committee.

PR: Yes, I was the chairman. Doc Anderson was the vice chairman and the one guy from down at Hysham was the other member.

BB: Would've been Dave Manning?

PR: No not Dave, different. Dave and I were good friends. Dave was really a gentleman. He didn't like to speak on bills that he had, so he asked me if I would do it for him, which I did. Oh, he was really a fine gentleman.

BB: Yes. I knew him well too, I served with him as well. But James was close to the Anaconda Company?

PR: Yes, but I'm getting back to —

BB: Because he was from up in Farmers Union country, where people of his district would've been surprised at that, wouldn't they?

PR: Yes. He was a pious kind of a S.O.B., but anyway —

BB: Very religious, I remember that too.

PR: Yes. I was chairman of the Committee on Committees and when we had our first meeting I said, "We're not gonna report anything out of this committee until it's done and we're not gonna let anyone come in and talk to us until this is done." Which we did. Well, we reported out to committees, every member of the Senate got their first choice in their committee. Many of them got all their choices, but everyone got their first choice. The only committee we didn't report—we reported them all on the same day, was the Rules Committee. I told Dave James, our floor leader, I said, "We're not going to report this because that Senator from Yellowstone County as soon as we report it, he's going to object, stand up and object." Dave says, "I'll back you a hundred percent." So I said okay. We reported it out, the Republican senator from Yellowstone County did it.

BB: Hibbs maybe?

PR: Rex Hibbs, yes.

BB: He would've been close to the Anaconda Company probably, Hibbs would've been?

PR: Well, I'd say quasi-.

BB: Oh okay, maybe less so than they Dave James?

PR: Yes, right.

BB: But anyway, so he objected?

PR: Rex and I are good friends. We would have drinks together and stuff down at the Montana Club. We're good friends. Well, he did just what I told Dave he would do, what I expected him to do. And that damn James recessed the Senate.

BB: And the effect of that was?

PR: Then Dave Manning was the one that we were doubtful about. Dave got up and withdrew his name from being on the committee, so we got what we wanted. But that night, the IR, the Independent Record, [story was headlined] "Democrats Lose First Floor Fight."

BB: Just so I understand, Rex Hibbs wasn't satisfied with the recommendations that the Committee on Committees made?

PR: No, only one committee, the Rules Committee.

BB: He didn't like the way you structured the Rules Committee?

PR: Right. We structured the committees so the Democrats would have control over them, where of course Rex had that figured out. When Dave withdrew his name, the committee evolved in just the way we wanted it. That wasn't the way, of course, the IR —

BB: Because the IR, of course, was owned by the Anaconda Company.

PR: Yes, right. They owned every paper except the —

BB: Great Fall Tribune. Did you notice then when you read the Helena IR during a legislative session, did the story seem to be biased?

PR: Oh yes. That's what I said, we'd meet up here all day and when you read the review that was in the IR, you wouldn't know it was the same legislature.

BB: Who were the reporters? Do you remember the name of a reporter?

PR: Yes. I guess some of those names it takes me a little while. I can't come up with them.

BB: Was J.D. Holmes a reporter for them then? [Holmes was a reporter for the Associated Press.]

PR: Holmes was a reporter, but he was little fairly more independent. Yes, but he was a reporter.

BB: Yes, okay. Let's see, what was a big bill or a big issue when you were a legislator? An important bill and an important issue?

PR: You want a story?

BB: Yes I do.

PR: The bills that we were always important was highway construction. In either '53 or '55, the highway department came to us in the legislature and said if we would increase the tax for the highways from 6 cents to 7 cents, it would be temporary until they had some special job they wanted to do. So that was fine, we did that. We increased the fuel tax from 6 to 7 cents and that all went to the highway department. Well, of course in '59 they came back and they wanted to make it permanent. So I thought, well now here you guys you said this was going to be temporary and we moved it up to 7, but now you want to keep it at 7. So I had an amendment, but I didn't even tell Bob Durkee what I was going to do; he was sitting next to me. Then, the secretary read every section of every bill. Well I had my amendment made out to change it from 7 to 6 and took it up. I stood right there and watched her. Then when she got to that section I handed her my amendment. Well, in those days, the lieutenant governor presided over the Senate. He stood up, his hair fell in his eyes, his glasses fell off.

BB: Who was he?

PR: Cannon.

BB: Paul Cannon?

PR: Do you remember him?

BB: Yes, he was an old Butte politician.

PR: Yes, right. Kind of a pompous kind of a guy. Well he stood up, I'm telling you literally his—you know a guy like me would be jealous of a guy with some hair, but anyway. His hair fell

down, his glasses fell on the desk, he recessed the Senate, and then the lieutenant governor's office was just across [the hall]. Went in and locked the door and wouldn't answer the phone. So here we are—oh this was a night session. Everybody was gone, the lobbyists, nobody was around. Well then the lobbyists started to come back, the governor, you know. I can't remember how long we sat there with Cannon locked in his office. It was at least an hour, it was quite a long time.

BB: Because Canon wanted to keep you from acting on this?

PR: He didn't know how to vote. He was afraid it was going to be a tie. You see the only time he had a vote —

BB: Sure, yes.

PR: Well Cannon, then he was going to be a candidate for governor, you know. Cannon didn't know how to vote. He thought it'd be a tie. Well we knew it was going to be close. He had lost his then—

BB: This was 1959?

PR: Yes. The Senate rules was the Jefferson Manual, are you acquainted with the —

BB: Well not really.

PR: That's the rules that the United States House uses.

BB: Yes, that were apparently fashioned originally by Thomas Jefferson.

PR: Yes. Well the Jefferson Manual was the rulebook for the Montana Senate. Well, Cannon had lost his rulebook also, he didn't know where it was. So I was the only guy in the Senate that had the rule book. My stepfather was in the United States Congress and had given me the Jefferson Manual, so I had it.

BB: Who was your stepfather?

PR: Jim Haley. James A. Haley was the Representative from the seventh District of Florida, was my stepfather. That was really a fun night.

BB: So he finally came out?

PR: We finally got Cannon.

BB: Somebody must've gotten him on the telephone and told him how to vote.

PR: He wouldn't answer the phone.

BB: Maybe he called somebody.

PR: He may have done that. Anyway, the representative who was head of the highway department, he would have to ask me what the rules were.

BB: He was the chairman of the highway committee?

PR: Yes, he'd have to ask me what the rules were, because I had the rulebook and I kept it right there. The two—Donovan Worden from Missoula County—

BB: The Republican senator from Missoula.

PR: And the Republic senator from Lewis and Clark County came and voted with me. I mentioned Donovan Worden because he said if I was elected to the Senate and got on the Senate Judiciary Committee, he'd resign. Well, I did and he didn't, and we became friends. Oh, and the piano player from—

BB: Peewee?

PR: No.

BB: Herald? Polson?

PR: No. Well he and Claude Kit from Ringling used to give us entertainment. Miller Smith, J. Miller Smith.

BB: J. Miller Smith was a senator from Lewis and Clark County, yes.

PR: Well he and Donovan Worden came over and voted with me on my amendment. I told Bob Durkee, I said those three guys aren't gonna run again and neither one of them did. Anyway, to make a long story short, my amendment passed in the Senate.

BB: And it reduced the —?

PR: The fuel tax from 7 cents back to 6 cents. Then I knew the House would pass it if I could get it out of the Senate.

BB: And the reason that that was a hard vote was because the contractors and maybe the labor unions all desperately wanted to build more road, provide more jobs.

PR: Right.

BB: And you just felt the tax was high enough?

PR: Well I thought they should do what they promised us they would do. The Highway Department promised us if we would raise it from 6 to 7 in the House that, for that interim, then it would go back to 6. Well in '59 of course, they wanted to make it permanent at 7.

BB: Didn't the governor veto it?

PR: No. Hugo Erickson was the governor, no.

BB: He was okay with your position on it?

PR: He signed the bill, course if he vetoed it, he vetoed the whole highway bill. He wasn't going to do that.

BB: I see, because that rate was just part of the whole highway bill?

PR: Yes, right.

BB: I see. Did you know Hugo?

PR: Oh yes.

BB: Tell me about him?

PR: I liked Hugo. He had that secretary that worked for him from Park County. The man you know—

BB: Oh, Fred?

PR: Yes, Fred. [Fred Martin.]

BB: He's a newspaperman.

PR: Yes. I know that he wrote, I think he was jealous of Hugo, and he wrote those speeches. I know he put words in there that he knew Hugo couldn't pronounce. I liked Hugo. One time, there was a big doings here in Helena out at the Shrine Temple. Hugo, he said, "One thing about old Hugo; when I fall on my face, I'm six feet further ahead."

BB: [laughs] When I fall on my face, I'm six feet further ahead?

PR: Yes, “further” [saying it with Hugo’s accent].

BB: “Further.” Because he talked in that heavy Swedish accent, I heard that too.

PR: Yes, but I liked him. When I had my name on a bill, he would call the Carl Rostad, who you knew.

BB: Yes.

PR: And ask him if the bill, if my name was on it. Hugo didn't really trust me. If Carl gave him the okay, then it was fine with Hugo. I liked Hugo.

BB: Do you think Hugo was an Anaconda Company man?

PR: I don't think he was. I think he was fairly independent.

BB: Yes, I’ve run into that too—other people have said the same thing.

PR: I didn't dislike Hugo.

BB: He was fairly conservative, I think, in his point of view.

PR: Yes, but I do remember one thing. That was the time when we approved the new governor's mansion. Hugo didn't give a damn what it looked like, but it was not gonna have a copper roof.

BB: Yes [laughs]. Well good for him. Some names here, Paul, that I’m just interested in. Did you ever know Wellington Rankin?

PR: Oh yes, very well.

BB: He was a fairly substantial rancher in that White Sulphur Springs area. Well, describe him?

PR: Wellington was a real personality, always dressed up, you know. A real sharp attorney and an active wheeler-dealer kind of a guy. Had his office up in that building just right on the Main Street in Helena. A terrible rancher. He had the knack of putting those ranches together, but was a terrible operator as a rancher. Art Acher did all the legwork for him.

BB: Arthur Acher was his law partner?

PR: Yes. Acher did the digging in the books.

BB: Research?



PR: Did the research and the legwork and everything.

BB: So was Rankin an impressive person?

PR: Yes, who spoke in loud voice. When he would come—he met where the Judiciary Committee met—you about had to open the windows when Rankin came in to talk.

BB: He was an orator?

PR: Yes.

BB: With the good vocabulary and—

PR: Right.

BB: And the big voice and a big presence and that sort of thing. You said he was congenial with you personally?

PR: Yes, and he was a good friend of my sister that's a year younger than me and represented my sister. My mother was in the probate court for about 14 years and just as she had things settled up, my sister sued her for part of the estate and Rankin was her attorney.

BB: I see, okay. And I imagine he won?

PR: Well they settled it, yes. Shook my mother down for a pretty good chunk of money.

BB: Rankin did?

PR: Well, my sister.

BB: Yes sure, I see.

PR: Then when my sister married the second time, Rankin stood up with her.

BB: Really?

PR: Yes. So yes, I knew Rankin.

BB: And it sounds like generally favorably?

PR: Well not. Just knew him, let's put it that way.

BB: If you could describe him in three words? One sentence?

PR: Three words...

BB: Well, one sentence.

PR: Use the words brilliant, there's one word. No conscience, there's three words. Well that's the three words.

BB: Okay, all right. Was the senator from Butte, who was the Anaconda Company inside guy, was that Frank Reardon?

PR: Yes.

BB: Okay, I was wondering about that.

PR: I really liked Frank, a genuinely nice kind of—

BB: I knew him a little bit too. I was there beginning in the House when he was just leaving the Senate. I think he was an old plumbing contractor wasn't he, something like that?

PR: He may have been, but—

BB: As a shrewd operator.

PR: Oh yes. A keen mind; a nice person.

BB: Yes. U.S. Senator James Murray?

PR: I knew Murray, just knew him; basically more than that I knew who he was. I knew Metcalf.

BB: Tell me about Metcalf.

PR: Metcalf, when I first knew him, was in the Western District of Montana. There then Montana had two representatives. He changed. He was pretty well oriented around the timber and was all for logging and everything. Then later, became more of a conservationist.

BB: But to begin with he was all for timber harvest, then later on became more of a conservationist, yes. Did you meet him personally?

PR: I knew him personally, yes. I wouldn't say we were good friends, I mean I didn't know him well enough to be a friend. Now I was a friend I've always felt with Mike Mansfield, but not with Lee Metcalf.

BB: What was the basis of your friendship with Mansfield?

PR: Well, when I went to school for a couple of quarters at Missoula, he was one of my teachers. Then I got to know him through politics and then Mike is the one—I don't know if I told it or not—but I was the administrator of the Farm Service Agency in Montana for two years. The reason that I was is that Mike asked me to do it. He said, "You're gonna either straighten it out, or we're gonna close it down." You can't imagine what a slovenly outfit that Farm Service Agency in Bozeman was when I went to work there.

BB: And what was it? What is it a clearinghouse for—?

PR: All the farm programs in Montana went through that agency. The conservation programs, the wheat, the barley, the grains, everything went through that office. It was downtown on the south side of Bozeman. Slovenly; one of the program specialists worked as a janitor when his job stopped at 5:00 in the afternoon as a program specialist. He and his wife became the janitors.

BB: But you did manage to get it straightened out?

PR: Oh, yeah. I talked to the first fella that owned the building, I said, "Jerry, they're going to straighten this thing out and we're out of here." Well he wasn't so sure I could do it and I wasn't either. My secretary was a woman, a girl. I'll call her a girl, a young woman helping put her husband through college. I asked her, I said, "Is the ladies restroom as bad as the men's?" And she said, it's worse. It was awful that place, you just can't imagine how bad it was. Then these goddamn program specialists who came in. I said, if you represent the United States and some farmer comes from Culbertson or way off, he and his wife spend all day driving to Bozeman and probably stay all night and meet you with a shirt open, with a dirty undershirt on. It took a while, but I finally got them all to put on a [shirt]. One morning, the last specialist, when he walked in the office where I was, I said, "Look!" He had on a tie and a clean shirt.

BB: Well that's good. Paul, I'm interested in your impressions of Mansfield, especially when he was a professor. How would you describe him as a teacher?

PR: I think he was an excellent—I remember him as an excellent teacher. Of course he taught what I was interested in, history.

BB: Yes. What made him a good teacher?

PR: Well the congeniality and he could communicate with the students. Had a good rapport in his classes with his students. Acted like he was interested in you as a student.

BB: Would you say that personality trait followed him into politics?

PR: I think very much so.

BB: Yes. He is legendary for remembering people's names.

PR: Oh yes. Remember their names, whatever they're all about. Then Mike, when he traveled around Montana, just Mike and a driver. They stopped at every, you know, they'd be in towns and then they'd be in White Sulphur Springs and they'd be in Martinsdale and Harlowton. Then he had a friend, probably an ex-student, in every one of those towns. That's where he went. In White Sulphur Springs there'd be the Rainbow Café, not the bar, but the café. People would come, Mike would be there until the driver would look at his watch and say, "We've got to go."

BB: But he'd just sit there and visit with people who came in?

PR: Anybody.

BB: Just having coffee with them?

PR: Yes.

BB: So he'd maybe spend all day when Congress wasn't in session, he was back in Montana just stopping in little towns across the state. Hearing what people thought about things, kind of getting a finger on the public pulse and so on?

PR: Yes, right.

BB: Describe him in one sentence or just a few words.

PR: If I can say the word magnanimous.

BB: Magnanimous?

PR: Magnanimous and friendly, outgoing, is that enough?

BB: Yes, that's good. Was he smart?

PR: Oh yes, you bet, and smart politically. And he and that Republican from Vermont or—?

BB: George Aiken.

PR: They had breakfast together every morning.

BB: Yes, back in the U.S. Senate.

PR: Republican, Democrat.

BB: Orvin Fjare?

PR: I mostly knew who Orvin was and I think Orvin was—I don't think Orvin ever quite put it all together. That's my opinion.

BB: Yes. Wes Duarte?

PR: I knew Wes, and of course, Wes was a pretty congenial kind of a politician. He was elected and re-elected. Was from out just west of Wilsall.

BB: LeRoy Anderson?

PR: A pompous kind of a guy.

BB: He'd been a general in World War II.

PR: Yes, and he never got over it.

BB: Yes, okay. I remember when I was just a kid we took a field trip to Helena. So our high school class was seated up in the Senate gallery and this guy stood up to speak and he had this mane of white hair and he had kind of a ruddy complexion. I mean it was almost like he'd been suntanned or something, even though the legislature met in the winter, but I remember that about him. A very imposing figure, tall and impressive, but his voice wasn't very impressive. And that was LeRoy Anderson. It was a kind of a squeaky, disappointing voice coming out of the guy like that, but he was the picture of pomposity, I mean in terms of his presence, you know, standing up and—

PR: He was real conscious of his presence.

BB: Of his presence and his appearance, yes. It was impressive, at least I thought so, but I was surprised when he started to talk. I don't know if you remember that about him or not. He looked like he should have sounded like Wellington Rankin, but he didn't sound like Wellington Rankin.

PR: That's correct. He was a Farm Union guy.

BB: From up at Conrad?

PR: Yes.

BB: Yes. Forrest Anderson?

PR: Forrest was one of the last of the [politicians that] really worked all the angles. He was one of the last that was able to manipulate, work all the angles in Montana politics.

BB: Give me an example?

PR: Well, Forrest actually was able to milk the state, you know. He made it pay off.

BB: Meaning that he might have been dishonest?

PR: I don't think he was any more dishonest than anybody ahead of him. He knew how to work all the levers and everything.

BB: Yes, but when you say work all the levers?

PR: Well, I don't know how it is up here now in Montana government. Fifty years, we're talking about a lot of years ago, there were a lot of little rat holes around the state where there might be a few dollars here and there coming out of it.

BB: I see. How would you, because he was governor—

PR: Yes.

BB: And so was Hugo Aronson.

PR: Yes.

BB: How would you compare them?

PR: I think Hugo was straighter. I'd say Hugo was not the manipulator that Forrest Anderson was.

BB: Describe Forrest as a person?

PR: As a person, I would probably have liked Hugo as a person better than I did Forrest.

BB: Well you know, we described LeRoy Anderson.

PR: Yes.

BB: Forrest, to me, looked like Leroy Anderson except he was about 2/3 as tall.

PR: Yes, small in stature.

BB: Very small in stature, but a very impressive guy with them.

PR: And a real nimble mind, yes. He had a much better mind in general, Anderson, yes.

BB: So when you say he was quick on his feet in terms of like being able to formulate arguments and that sort of thing?

PR: Yes and he had the ability to size up people real well and put them where he wanted them to work in his administration and that type of thing.

BB: You think he had some pretty good people therefore in his administration?

PR: Yes, he did.

BB: Yes, that's kind of been his reputation from other people I've talked to. Tim Babcock?

PR: Of course, Tim was in the legislature the same time that I was. It's about two weeks ago now, I was on that Big Sky Honor flight to go back to—

BB: Oh, you went back to Washington, D.C. with the World War Two veterans along with Tim Babcock.

PR: Yes and Tim was there. Tim was a veteran of the Battle of the Bulge. I think he received a Bronze Star there.

BB: Yes.

PR: Tim, we've known each other and visited a couple of times on this trip. We were never friends, but we weren't unfriendly either. We knew each other; of course we were on opposite sides. Now, you know, Tim had a sweetheart, which you probably knew.

BB: While he was governor or —?

PR: Yes, before and after. When I was in the opposite, Bozeman, and sometimes when Tim was governor, there'd be sometimes when the federal government and the state government would have to work together. So I'd call her. We knew each other and we were friendly, but I mean just friends. I'd call her and explain the whole deal and she okayed it. Well then Tim would sign it or whatever you know, cooperate.

BB: Did she work in his office?

PR: She was his secretary.

BB: Okay I see, okay. This was while he was governor?

PR: Yes. Well he later had the Colonial [Hotel] out here. When I first remember the Colonial, it was just a pasture around a nightclub. It wasn't like it is now. For instance, Jorgenson's, when I was first here, that whole complex wasn't here. There was one place to eat, mostly one place to eat downtown.

BB: Yes. Well the original Colonial was out by the airport wasn't it? It's a little red and white building out by the airport?

PR: No, not by the airport. It's kind of out where it is now, but there was nothing around it.

BB: Yes. Well, he was quite a guy in the trucking business too, before he became governor.

PR: Before he was in the legislature, he was at Babcock and Lee Trucking Company out of Miles City.

BB: Do you remember anything about him as a legislator?

PR: Yes, I can remember him. Mostly voted with this party. I can't remember him with any particular legislation, but voted with his party obviously.

BB: Jim Battin?

PR: Jim was a big, kind of a bunch of hot air. He wasn't a very competent attorney. The firms that he was in could hardly afford him. He didn't, but he was another politician.

BB: In terms of being friendly and when you say a politician?

PR: He was an agile type politician. Jim and I weren't friendly at all. He was in the legislature at the same time that I was. He was inclined to be a little pompous. Of course I was on the Judiciary Committee, but was not an attorney. He couldn't imagine this guy working on law that wasn't an attorney.

BB: Arnold Olsen?

PR: I knew Arnold quite well. He was always worried about how his appropriation would come and my seat —

BB: This is when he was Attorney General, he was concerned about his appropriation?



PR: Yes. My seat was right by the door as you come in the Senate. Well, Arnold would always have somebody come and I told him, "Arnold, you're going to have to quit calling me out of the Senate. Just stay down there on the next floor and leave me alone." You know, I'm trying to follow the legislation and stuff. "We'll watch out for you, you don't have to worry about us."

BB: Describe him in just a few words?

PR: I liked Arnold and Arnold was a politician, not as quite as smart as some of them. Maybe a little insecure.

BB: I'm gonna ask you about a couple of legislators before we end our interview here and give you an opportunity of course to expand anything you'd like to. George Siderius?

PR: George and I were real good friends. George was from over in western Montana.

BB: Senator from Flathead.

PR: Yes. I liked George, we were real good personal friends and I thought [he] was an excellent legislator.

BB: And he was an agriculturalist, he was a farmer. Had been a school teacher.

PR: Yes.

BB: Do you remember any legislation he might have been involved in or any experience you had with him?

PR: He was on the Judiciary Committee and he despised that committee. So I had a deal with him; I'd always mark him as present, but he didn't have to come unless I needed his vote. That was just an agreement between he and I.

BB: Sure. So he was close to you and trusted you?

PR: Oh we were good friends, yes.

BB: Tom Haines?

PR: Haines—

BB: Republican from Missoula.

PR: Yes. He was kind of austere, that's the word I'd use.

BB: Not real friendly?

PR: No. We weren't friends. We weren't really enemies, but we weren't friends. He was austere.

BB: He was a businessman, I know.

PR: Yes, held them pretty close to his chest.

BB: Jake Frank?

PR: Well I knew him, Jake and I were good friends. I knew Jake before I was ever in the legislature. Jake was from down in Park City, or um, yes, Park City.

BB: Was he a colorful character, an interesting character, a controversial character?

PR: He was colorful and Jake was pretty much a Farmer's Union kind of a representative. Was elected down there.

BB: Would've been somewhat radical in his politics at least in his day and age?

PR: Yes, he was a dedicated Democrat. I like Jake; Jake and I were good personal friends.

BB: Mervin Dempsey?

PR: I remember Mervin.

BB: Democrat from Butte?

PR: Yes, and a Company guy.

BB: And a Company guy, yes.

PR: And I liked him, yes.

BB: He had a partner from there who had kind of the same reputation. I don't want to put words in your mouth, but a guy by the name of John Cunningham?

PR: Cunningham, I barely, I mostly knew who he was.

BB: I mentioned their names because when I interviewed Jake Frank, there was an altercation between Jake and Dempsey and Cunningham. Jake suspected that Dempsey and Cunningham

were pretty close with the Anaconda Company and perhaps had shared some information that they shouldn't have that came out of your Democratic Party caucus with them. I don't know if you know the story or not?

PR: Well, the caucuses, there was always the cauc—

[End of Interview]