

6 Bonner History Roundtable: Health and Safety

<https://youtu.be/QO7bgTrq824>

April 18, 2010, at St. Ann Catholic Church in Bonner

Glenn Smith

Ellen Leahy

Julie Beckel

This program has been edited for clarity.

[00:00:59] **Minie Smith:** Welcome to the Bonner Area History Roundtable. I'm so glad you all could come on this beautiful day and I appreciate your not wanting to be outside when we haven't had so many nice days. But this is great. We've got a wonderful program. But before we begin, I just want to thank the Friends of Two Rivers and the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula and MCAT, who is doing the filming of this and so you'll be able to see it on a DVD and A) on the television, and B) later on, a DVD, and, of course, St. Ann Church for letting us use the space. Okay, I'm gonna turn this over to Glenn who's going to give us a program on the health and safety at the Bonner mill.

Glenn Max Smith: OK. We'll get started. First I'd like to bring you up to speed a little bit on our activities for the past month. I had a pleasure, and I mean this from the bottom of my heart, to visit with Lois and Bob Johnson and hear some stories of Bonner before I come around. So we traced out a lot of the old houses and who lived where and some all-around good stories.

Also, with that, I was able to meet with Nina Petroff, whose father was a section foreman down here on the Milwaukee, and I got some fabulous stories from Nina. So we're in the process now of trying to get all this rounded up, documented into a story form. But for today's activities, I need to have you go back with me in time to about 1912 and we'll start 'er up from there.

We're gonna go way back. Okay. At that time you can all remember one of the big historical events was the Titanic sailed out of Belfast Harbor, and they thought, "What a great ship, it can't sink. It's got all these plush features." But for some reason it dove beneath the waves. And that was it. You know, 1,500 people. The reason for that was, in my interpretation, was the fact that too much attention was given to how much profit we're gonna make, and too little attention was given to how many lifeboats do we have? Who's trained to see that these boats are loaded and that the people get off?

Okay. So from that lesson, we need to come back to the time here in this country when the 27th president of our country here, Howard Taft. Then one of the men out here at Bonner up in the Trout Creek area, was named Mark [Mack] Ross. He was the brother to Kenneth Ross. And what [Mack] did was hire a man known as Cash [Cassius] McEwen.

I didn't know about Cash until Dennis [Sain] gave me a book on his autobiography. And Cass was one of these guys that wasn't afraid to think outside the box. You know, safety should be given a lot more attention than what's being given to it. So he, and while he was employed here, his term of employment, he done some pretty strange things.

[00:04:57] One of 'em was... the camps was, there was a bedbug problem. And he thought, "Now, come on. If we wanna have a desirable work camp here, let's get some decent bedding for these guys," and then from there it progressed into... He had kind of a knack for first aid medical supplies and stuff like that. He wanted them where they were easily accessible. Now the mentality then, and I think that mentality remained even during my time of employment, where many an old timer told me, you know, if you can't stand the pace out here, then you need to move on because this is where the men work. But no matter how strong of a man you were, when it come time to get hurt, you were gonna get hurt and probably bad.

Cass referred to crosscut saws as a row of carefully filed daggers. Each one filed at a certain angle and capable of just giving some horrendous cuts. He referred to a double-bitted ax that the knot bumpers would use. Those boys are pretty proud of their tools. Those axes were kept razor sharp. And on a winter's day, you know, when the timber's icy and whatnot, a misdirected blow could glance off and go into a leg or a boot, could cause some horrendous damage. So Cass prepared for this. Another one of his friends, Don MacKenzie... they referred them as the two Macs. They've done a lot of great things out here.

Okay. When we get down to Cass, I need to, I'd like to talk about another person that thought outside the box. And I think, you know, from my experience, this person was a lady, her name was Helen Homme. And if you was to come into this plant and look at it... In fact, there is a video that Dennis has made up, it's entitled "Trees..." and correct me if I'm wrong on this, "Trees to Logs, Logs to Lumber." What it boils down to is this overview of the entire operation from the time that tree was cut until we poked it through the old sawmill, right up to the time when we built and remodeled and got this big square one out here.

So this whole, if you can look at that video, you'll get a good understanding on what was involved, what kind of jobs was there, what these guys had to do. Now, imagine, we're working and the injuries were, we're soupin' this plant up. The injuries are getting worse and we're making modifications. It's kinda like you got an old flathead Ford. You want to get a little more power out of that thing. Put some Edelbrock heads on it, Mallory ignition, jack them carburetors up. Let's see what this baby can do. That's kind of what we were doing here. So we build this, we rebuilt. Our sawmill is updated. Our big planer building is coming up online, and it's a building like, I don't know, Jim [Willis?], if you can remember when they were grading that out. It was... the size of that thing was tremendous as compared to what we were used to seeing. Seven and a half acres is what that big square building covers down there.

Okay. Imagine a lady coming in. Now we've gone on strike. We've got hurt because of our ... We've considered everything about this mill, but the fact that we're gonna hurt people. Our production is going up, profits are looking good, ... and we're annihilating people. And the temperament of the crew out here got to the point, said, "Enough's enough. Let's fix this or shut her down." So we did. Local 3038 sanctioned that strike and out we went. Well, to settle up, get us back to work again, they brought in Helen [Homme] and Ellen [Leahy] and Julie [Beckel]. And they come into the mill, and I can only imagine what went through their minds when they walked in through that gate and first looked at that mill.

[00:10:03] There's machinery in there that if you'll, if you can watch this video that we have or this, we won't have time to run it, but you can check it out. If you watch that, take a look and see what those machines involved. Now imagine some ladies coming in here that has to figure out how are we going to get somebody out of there if they get hurt, and once we get 'em out, how are we gonna take care of 'em?

So there was a lot of planning that took place and eventually we got to where it wasn't a half bad place to work. The only drawback was we run for a few years after that. This from 1972 'til about 1987. We run, we had us a tight nursing staff, and injuries didn't go away completely, but we did knock the heck out of them.

So 1987. Word come out from, we belonged to Champion, now we're gonna tear this old mill down and we're gonna rebuild it. So at that point is what we have from '87 to what was just recently shut down was what we had. But what I'm gonna dwell on here is just what we had with the big board mill, and how these ladies come in and helped us get this back on track again.

Okay. I guess that's about my cue to quit rattling about this. Is there any questions to this point? Have I left you sitting in the fog somewhere or have I made this fairly clear? Good? Okay. Thumbs up. Yes, sir.

Jim Habeck: I'm trying to think of comparing. Nowadays if somebody gets injured on the job, there's all sorts of state or federal compensation programs. So the worst of it is something you haven't mentioned, that the injured employee with five kids does what? What does he do?

Glenn Max Smith: Okay. Depending upon the injury, he was... they tried to rehabilitate him, retrain him into another field. Some of that was successful. Some... One case I know of a fellow tangled up in the log processor got beat up bad. He couldn't work no more. It left him real bitter. They, you know, the medical expenses was paid naturally but they tried retraining him and everything, but it wasn't, he didn't feel that that was quite right. He give his heart to this mill, got busted up and now he's out there to try something else. So does that put some light on it?

Jim Habeck: Yeah. I'm wondering if the union contracts with the mill are in the history group's files for the actual language of what they agreed to. Not only in the one instance you mentioned, but before that when the workers first became unionized. Weren't there IWW people involved back in the ... ? And so on an so forth?

Glenn Max Smith: Yeah. Okay. To touch on that a little bit, whenever we had a serious accident like that there was an accident investigation in which union reps, company people... I was a safety rep, so I went along on that inspection and it was, we weren't there to form an opinion. We were there to find out what happened, why, what can we do to see that this don't happen again? Those are my personal experiences on that. As far as the union, we're trying to get together with one of our best resources on that would be Jimmy Hill. [He] was our business agent and

we haven't as yet got ahold of Jimmy and, but I'm sure when we do, possibly he might have some of these answers to the questions you're asking.

Jim Habeck: When did the eight hour a day business come in? Because I can think if you're working 12 hours, those last two hours is probably the highest accident period. You're fatigued mentally and physically.

[00:04:59] Glenn Max Smith: Yeah. Now most of my time was eight hours. I started in 1960 and 45 years later I retired, but most of my working hours were eight right up until the last rebuild. And then it was a decision that the company and the union together collectively says, "Let's try four tens. But that last... if you're used to working eight-hour shift, those last hours can really drag you down. And we went to, we had a lot of seminars. Of course, that's in the later mill days. We had a lot of seminars on how to set operators' consoles up to cut back on the fatigue. We had... oh gosh, the NIOSH lifting program come in. Champion even went as far as to hire a consultant. He was a design engineer for the Tomcat fighter jet, to come in and help us design some of these consoles. Unfortunately, we got two of them done out on the log processor and they were spiffy, but we ate up all our funds. So the rest of the plant had to settle for a tabletop like this with stop and start buttons and emergency stop and all that. But then we considered color. You know, if you're cooped up in an operator's cabin, it's dark and dingy and dirty, that wears on you, your attention span goes ka-phooey. You can think of a hundred million places you'd rather be than stuck out there. You want to be home with your family. My goal and I'm sure the goal of a lot of others, was to... let's get these employees in here, get 'em a shift, send them back home to their families intact so that they can enjoy the good things: Scouts, fishing, barbecuing, those sorts of things. So that's my take on that.

[00:17:12] Kim Briggeman: Glenn, I've seen a couple of references, and maybe there's people that remember this, that the day after Pearl Harbor the AFL or the CIO came in to Bonner and set up a union on December 8th, 1941. That until then, before then, there, the word is that there wasn't... Anaconda had prevented any union from forming until 1941. So essentially for the first half a century that there was a mill here.

Glenn Max Smith: Okay. Now that you've brought that point up, I grew up in Butte and Anaconda, and that's the head shed. (laughs) Now over there, when they squared off to do battle, now it was serious. They say if you look in the bottom of some of them mine shafts, you still might find body parts. As somebody who didn't quite agree with what the company had to say.

Let's see. Some of the nicer things about the company, Columbia Gardens, beautiful place over there, but it was company town. I think Marcus Daly wanted Anaconda to eventually become the capital. They packed a big stick out here, you know, and beings that this was a little offshoot, yeah, I can see where things would've been hectic. Now one of my recollections, another one that just came to surface... damn, this growin' old is tough 'cuz a lot of my memories are going out the window.

Another one of my recollections is baseball was a big thing out here. Our old baseball diamond, Kelly Pine Field, the Bonner Highlanders, the Bonner Lumberjacks. It was a big thing. So what the company would do in order to get their team so it could get up and just whale hell out of the Highlanders, if there was a good second baseman out there, they'd hire him, give him a job in the mill and the guy that had the job in the mill went out the door.

[00:19:25] You know, I never experienced it. This is stories that's been told to me, but another reason why the union came in out here was to settle that kind problem that and many others.

See, I can remember, this has nothing to do with labor, but beings I'm on a trip down memory lane... we used to have at Marco Flats, the old Marco Flats, behind the Blackfoot Tavern, a union picnic. And if you grew up in a town like this, no TV. I think the entertainment we had was Edward R. Murrow and the News, One Man's Family. So when a picnic come along, this was big. So up to Marco Flats we'd go. Now I'm just, oh, boy, I'm not quite a teenager yet, but I've seen some of these old boys tip back a Highlander, you know, and this had to be good.

[00:20:23] So I was about to find this out. So we had a beer truck up there full of Highlander beer and also full of little Community Creamery Dixie cups of ice cream with a wooden spoon. So as kids, we'd bail in and out of that truck, we'd get our Dixie cup and slip a couple of Highlanders in our pocket.

We had a fellow out here named Bob Lerch. Big, bigman. And Bob told us a couple times, "You get your little hind ends outta here. If I catch you here again, bad things are going to happen." We'll watch till you ain't looking. We'll get our beer. I personally went in there for a beer and this vice grabbed me behind the neck and then grabbed the belt on my backside, and I went out the door of that goddamn truck. (laughs) Excuse my language, but I don't think I, when I hit the ground, I don't think I stopped running until I got clear to the river. And when he said, "Stay outta that beer truck," that's exactly what I did. That's one of my fonder memories of Local 3038 up there.

Anna Sain: Did you want to mention, Glenn, that we have a book on Cassius Wells McEwen that he and his son, Cassius Richard or Dick McEwen, wrote back here for people to look at?

Glenn Max Smith: Okay. Has everybody heard that? That's where I got a lot of my information material was from Cass's book and it's fascinating. If you want an inside of what this early operation was about, you need to read that one. That is well formatted. It's just an excellent book.

Okay. Do we need to get back to some more of how we took care of and who helped us take care of some of our injuries over here?

OK, with that we have a kind of a PowerPoint thing. I think it's been playing here. The best thing to do now is ... I can't imagine, 'cuz I came from the mill, so I'm used to walking in there and hearing the roar and the scream of those planers and the squall of those band saws when the logs are going through, the clanking of the machines.

Let's see, add to that, some more memories. A great big whistle. As I mentioned the Titanic, there was a whistle out here that could have easily rivaled the Titanic's whistle. That thing went off at, what, eight o'clock in the morning? Seven o'clock, five o'clock, six o'clock. So let's see. There was those noises.

We had one planer out here that was a Berlin 90. It was made in Germany, run a lot of timbers on that. And when that started up in the morning, you could hear that. It sounded just like an old police siren. It wound up and you could hear it screaming all over Bonner, Milltown, and ... the whole day. So what I'm thinking here is - I'm used to this, I grew up with it. But when our nurse ladies come in, that's a whole different environment for them. So hopefully we can get their take on what they encountered. Some of their memories. So if you would like, and you feel comfortable just talking from there, why... great. Julie, did you want to go together?

several speakers: We all, we went in the mill. We, but that was cute. Thanks. (nurses go to the speaker's table)

Ellen Leahy: Julie was there longer. I think you were there 11 years.

Julie Beckel: I was the second draft.

Ellen Leahy: Then I was a first draft, so that's why I think I'm the only black and white picture in here. (indicates photo of nurses) And I was a new nurse. I was really drawn when I read about the wildcat strike. I was new to Missoula. I was hired to work out at St. Pat's Intensive Care, 'cuz they just started doing open hearts back in '78. Six? Yes. I think it was 76. I don't know, somebody [will] have to check these dates. [late 1975]

[00:25:04] But, and I was working intensive care for not very long and they started bringing in guys that were very memorable to me that had been injured. And one in particular, I don't remember who he was and probably now it's against the law to say who it was, but he had what you would've called a splinter. But you know, a splinter could be this big or it could be this big. (gestures sizes of splinters) Right? And he had one right through the groin, real close to the femoral artery. And it was gruesome and it was scary. And I worked the night shift. And I was reading about the... You know, I was just kind of amazed that there was no other way to respond to him. And I was reading about the wildcat strike. I don't know exactly when it happened, but it was about that time and I was real familiar. I came from the Steel Belt. I was raised in Cleveland, so I was real familiar with unions and my family on the Halligan side, all the men are IBEW apprentice, journeyman, masters, all of 'em. Steel mill guys.

And I knew the importance of a wildcat strike. I mean that was very, very important. And that, and seeing that injury, two of 'em I'm remembering just motivated me. And when they said they had come to some sort of settlement, we're gonna do something with nurses, I just got in my car and came out here and met with James Connelly.

And if we're gonna have fond memories as we do of Helen Homme, who, I don't know how she put up with me, but thank God, she did, 'cause I was like 22, I have very fond memories of James Connelly because between the two of them that got this started on the management side and hired me and guided me and kept sending me back out there. [slide with Champion letterhead reads: March 25, 1977. Setting Up The Nursing Department At Bonner, Montana. Nurses: Helen Homme, Supervisor; Russ Derby, Swing Shift; Ellen Leahy, Graveyard. Edith Thibodeau, Relief]. I just said, "I have to work out here. I just have to do this." And he said, "We're gonna have applications, put 'em in." And I got hired and, of course, being the youngster, I got the night shift, which was fine with me. 'Cause all of us youngsters... we got Joe Peterson here. He was raised in Bonner. And Mark Quinn. We all worked the night shift. (refers to audience members) You worked on the quad? Or something, you had cant hooks, I remember that. And you worked on the peeler, I can't remember what it's called. Up in the vats. Yeah, in the vats. Yeah. I can't remember

what I did yesterday, but I remember that. And what's interesting to me is I wasn't afraid to come here. I probably should have been.

What I was really afraid of was finding my way around on the catwalks. So I thought I was really smart and I asked for a plan, a bunch of blueprints. And before I started, during my two-week notice from St. Pat's, I studied these blueprints like crazy 'cuz my biggest fear was I'm not gonna get to the machine, I'm not gonna get there because you gotta go up few levels and down and over. And then when I got here, I figured they must have given me the as-builts because nothing matched on those catwalks. And, you'd no sooner learn them and somebody go cut one out and put a new one in. But I was too naive to really be worried about what I was gonna encounter. And I guess that was a good thing. I learned everything from Helen Homme.

I credit the mill with the huge 180 degree turn in my career from high-level acute care to public health, which is almost opposite. And it was here that I learned to switch from dealing with people that were comatose, not breathing, who you basically - you had control of that situation - to dealing with people that not only could breathe, were upright and wanted to argue with you. That was basically it. They'd wanna argue with you about what to do out on their turf. My earliest memory and then I'll give it to Julie 'cuz she's got, we'll get so many going. We'll have to get off the mic here.

But my earliest memory besides the whole business with the catwalks, coming out here, and they should have trained us. I mean, if it weren't for people like Joe and Mark and others on the job, I'd have been in a conveyor belt. Never thought to train us. Just let us loose out there. But it was probably my first week. It was night shift. I was on my own. I was walking around seeing if I knew the way around, kind of meeting people. And this really big guy, and it wasn't Ed Johnson, he was even bigger than Ed Johnson, who was a big part of the union of the wildcat strike, got me in a corner in plywood and he said, "You guys should have been union. We're the ones that walked out to have you. You're not really management, but you're not union." And he goes, "And don't you ever forget who got you here." And, of course, I had good appreciation for the union. But I clearly, I never, I've never forgotten that. So there's just a lot of stories, good and bad in learning, but I just have the fondest memories and the most appreciation for those of you that are holding these series and inviting me to be here 'cuz it's just very heartwarming to do.

[00:30:06] **Julie Beckel:** Where to begin. I'm really happy that y'all are here and I'll consider y'all a bunch of friends. Woohoo. That's right. We all worked in a lumber mill and we can't quite hear, so I'll make sure. I wasn't one of the pioneers that started. There were four nurses Helen, Ellen, Russ Derby, and Tibby was, Edith Thibodeau, was the relief person.

And I was working in surgery at St. Pat's and like Ellen would be on the ICU, the floor that took the injured worker probably after we had done surgery on him. And good minds think alike 'cuz I kept thinking, you know, we can take care of these people and patch 'em up. The docs can do anything here. Just ask them. But wouldn't it be nice if we could prevent those injuries? Wouldn't it be nice if people didn't get hurt in the mill, that they could go home in the shape that they came into work to play with their kids, go out to dinner with their wife or their husband?

And so for me, it was like, probably one of the only types of nursing I hadn't done yet. So I applied when Russ left and then the story begins. You know, at first I think I was very nervous. I was... (another speaker, unclear) Oh, I was very... I'm older than Ellen, so a few gray hairs really helped you, which really helped me go, "Why am I out here all by myself?" There's not like another nurse that you could say, "Could you help me?" Or a doctor here that can really help you. I remember calling my husband, who at the time was also a nurse, saying, "What have I gotten myself into? I'm here all by myself." He said, "Settle down. If they didn't think you could do it, they wouldn't have hired you." And I said, "But I don't know if I can do it." So it was an awful lot of learning your way around.

We wanted people to safely do the production 'cuz production was key. That was part of how we got paid. We wanted people to safely do their jobs and hopefully not get hurt. I remember that OSHA came into practice about the same time that... '78 when I started. So that was the blueprint, that was the floor plan that we had to work off of, thank goodness. 'Cuz I don't know if we could have come up with all that stuff by ourselves.

And so we, and thank goodness, 'cuz some of the bosses we had were like, "Just sit there and wait for people to come to you. Don't go out in the plant." And we were like, but when that emergency call comes in, we might not know where to go. And plus, nurses, you know, we're pretty social. So it was kind of nice to be out looking for the eye wash stations, looking for the first aid kits.

It was kind of a given. If somebody said, "Is someone hurt? You looking for 'em?" You'd say, "No, I'm just, I got my little list here. I gotta check eye wash stations." But then you were able to establish a rapport with the people and get

them to trust you that you were trying your hardest and, like Ellen said, thank goodness we had people there that were backing us up.

So the blueprint with OSHA was everything we worked on, the lockout, tagout, material safety data sheets, the right to know, and we tried to encourage that you have the right to know what chemicals you're working with. We tried to treat them all as if they were hazardous because then we were covering ourselves in case the next MSDS [Material Safety Data] sheet that would come out the week after says, "Oh my God, this is very carcinogenic. People are gonna get cancer." And we were already treating it as if it could do that. Are you thinking of anything you want to jump in?

Ellen Leahy: When we had a little meeting before we did this, that was really the first time I realized, 'cuz I had left by, I think by 1980, and you had joined at '78. I think I came in '76 or early '77, right after the wildcat [strike.]. How much you had taken the practice toward prevention. Because, I'd have to say we really didn't in the beginning. We did a little. We would do the spring breakup trainings out in the, like the Plains logs deck. We would go to Salmon. We did some of those kinds of first aid, CPR, assessment, couple of the other mills. And we would do that mostly in the logging areas, in the timberlands that were owned. But in the mill we were pretty much still in a response mode when I first joined. It was, "You're gonna be there and you're gonna respond and you're gonna figure out how to do it right." And much more against that how to respond and deal with the pressures of productivity.

[00:35:13] That was, to me, what was uppermost on my mind is if somebody went down in a conveyor, yeah, you had to turn the conveyor off. But if they went down next to a conveyor, did you have to turn the conveyor off? It'd be a lot better if you did turn the conveyor off. And those were calls that the nurses were actually told to make. And it was a culture change and that was real difficult because those foremen had to keep, and those workers had to keep things running.

So we were more, I think, early on in that response mode. But we got more into training. We got more into prevention. And I just give you a lot of credit for taking it much, much further over that next decade.

Julie Beckel: On the lighter side, we were nurses at the mill, but we also responded to company housing if there was ever a problem in any of the company homes. We responded to Highway 200. And thank goodness our backup was Station 4, Piltzville, right around the corner. Man, if you called them and said, or if you dial 9-1-1 and say, "We need an ambulance." The fire departments were the first ones that got the call. So they would come in and we knew that they knew where we were gonna be even before we were gonna be, because they worked in the mill. They knew how to get there. We did have an established rule that when we did call an ambulance, someone would meet them at the front gate and drive 'em into wherever we were, because if you just let 'em go by themselves, they'd be traveling around like we were doing the first couple times that we worked out there.

On the lighter side. This involves Harold's Club. (laughter)

Unknown speaker: Oh. Harold's, I think I have to leave.

Julie Beckel: Harold's Club is right over here in Milltown and there would be some people working together and just doing really good on production. And hey, how about stopping for a beer after work?

Ellen Leahy: After shift. Two drinks for the price of one. Always.

Julie Beckel: Yeah. Milltown. Harold's Club.

Ellen Leahy: 8:00 AM

Julie Beckel: Oh yeah. Getting off graveyard, go there for breakfast. Little, liquid breakfast. They also had great breakfast though. I mean, that's what I've been told. (laughs)

Ellen Leahy: Brown bottle. Brown bottle. I was on the shift with the youngsters and so brown bottle flu was our biggest chronic problem.

Julie Beckel: Yeah. But what I was gonna tell you is there'd be people that worked together and, you know, sometimes you spend more time with the people you work together than with your family. So we had a lot of work families. People that were on the same shift, the same departments, the same crew would work together for years and years. So, of course, they'd go over to Harold's. I usually worked that evening shift coming in at four and going home at midnight. And they'd go over there at the end of their shift, which I think was like 10 or 11. And wouldn't ya know at about bar closing time, right when I was getting ...

Ellen Leahy: You were waiting for me to get here 'cause I was always late.

Julie Beckel: Yeah. Or in school. And so these guys would get in a fight over there. Get so pissed off with each other, deck each other, and then they'd drag each other over to the nurse's station. Let's let the nurse fix you up over there.

Unknown speaker: Over here at the mill?

Julie Beckel: Over at the mill.

Ellen Leahy: And then we got to decide, 'cuz that would be change of shift for us. You know, she'd get 'em patched up or something and I'd have to decide if they could go back out there. Which in those days, the standards were, "Yeah, you could (overtalking) if they were night shift, if they were swing shift, they were done working."

Unknown speaker: Were you on the south side of the ...?

Ellen Leahy: We were at the main gate initially, right at the main gate. And yeah, we responded... when you talked about highway and community... we responded to homes a lot. I remember a whole family going down with carbon monoxide. Boy, just luckily they all ... and you remember the family, don't you? Four girls? I think it was. There's the Peters there. Who?

unknown speaker: Glen Murray?

Ellen Leahy: Yes. Four girls. And thank God one of them woke up with a bad headache or none of them would've woke up. I remember a couple Blackfoot wrecks. One guy going into the river, middle of the night, went through the ice, had a broken neck, ended up not paralyzed. Didn't seem right to me. So we spine-boarded him, but turned out he... I kept asking him if anybody else was in the car 'cuz he was in such a state of shock and I could tell he didn't have steering wheel injuries. So I figured he wasn't driving. But he couldn't answer me. He was in such a state of shock.

Well, it was his mother had been driving and she did go through the ice and she did die out there. And you know, it was just...

[00:40:00] But toward the end, and the end was quick for me 'cuz I was only there for about three years. But you got, when you said family or people that you were friends with and it got to, when you got the call to go to a certain machine, you knew who was hurt. And I really did not like that. And I always to this day wonder how it affected my judgment. Did I over or under respond? In my own, you know, I don't know. There's no real classic examples of one way or the other, but I didn't like that part. And you mentioned the whistle that I just gotta say one more thing about the whistle because when you work intensive care, you get your ear very attuned to different alarms.

This is this person and this bed, and it's their respirator, it's their... I hadn't been there in a long time, but I'm sure there's even more alarms. You get very... I couldn't be around a Keno machine because they would beep. I mean, I couldn't, it would just... Out here you learn the whistle and I can't remember now if it's four or five whistles for an emergency. But I know it wasn't one, and I know it wasn't two, and I know it wasn't three, because I would not relax until I'd heard that whatever was the last whistle. And then I knew it wasn't an emergency. It was a millwright or an electrician or a jam up or something. So that was an interesting memory. So you get very attuned to the culture and we had just a lot of support. We had just a lot of help. We really did. The early days were kind of hard, but after that we were helped by management, families, workers, you name it, ER guys, the Piltzville guys, all of 'em.

Julie Beckel: On the lighter side ...

Ellen Leahy: She keeps trying to go there.

Julie Beckel: For all you Twin Creeks people I see around here, the logging camps. We teach our CPR and first aid classes, and it was usually down here, what's the restaurant called now in, it was a Timberland's ...

unknown speaker: River City Grill.

Julie Beckel: River City Grill.

Ellen Leahy: It was a Timberlands site that they built and burned down and it burned down, and they built it again? (Did not rebuild). Yeah, it was the Timberlands office.

Julie Beckel: So that's where we'd have a lot of our classes. And we always did our classes with the guys before they went to hoot-owl hours, meaning that if it's warm outside you have to kind of wait until it starts getting colder. Then the logging roads are more frozen and they can get their trucks up there, their machinery, that type of thing. So somewhere in that magic mix, we'd do our CPR and first-aid classes, and we'd always do it over there. So the guys would come and they were the best students. And I think a lot that was because they were, like, way out in the boonies.

They knew if somebody got hurt out there, they needed their best friend, they needed their buddy, they needed their supervisor, they needed everyone to be trained so that they'd know how to take care of 'em. And so they were all such good students. And so they'd come in. We'd cruise on over there to have the class.

All the guys would walk to the back porch and we'd say, "Okay, now it's time." They had to spit their snus out, out. "Out." (gestures) Because if you've ever had to clean up Annie, the CPR Annie and there's snus in there...

Ellen Leahy: Yeah. And they wouldn't. They'd stick their tongue in there and we'd go, "You have to spit it out." (laughs)

Julie Beckel: "Is it out?" "Yeah." But trust me, they learned very well. It was always fun. They had to worry about bee sting bites up there in case someone was allergic to bees. How often did you get into beehives with your trees? I remember one time, Jim Connelly, bless his heart ... So there was a doctor that was trying to work on a Work Comp claim. That's what I was thinking about, and the doctor said, "This employee up at Twin Creeks could go back to work if he was on a track Cat." The Cat that you drive and the track goes around.

So Jim Connelly sends me up there to ride in one of the rubber-tire Cats and then the track Cat to see which one was less traumatic. And the doctor actually agreed with me. You know, I don't think it took someone to go up there. But those were times with Work Comp, 'cuz Work Comp, industrial Work Comp, was seen as a no-fault insurance. You're at the job, you got hurt, let's take care of you. That was kind of fun. Let me think. I did write some notes 'cuz I didn't know if we were gonna be...

Oh, yeah. We did a lot of safety meetings. Go into the plant and do the safety meetings and we try and do things that were also applicable to the home. Like if we talked about having a fire drill, we'd know where to meet, where to do the headcount, and that way we'd know everyone was out of the plant. So we'd all say, "Now, when you go home with your families, make a fire escape plan. Know that, okay, this is a fire drill. They practice it at school, on school buses, at work. Let's do it at home. Let's try and make sure that everyone knows where to meet."

[00:45:19] One time we had a bomb threat at the mill and the sheriff's office came out and at this time our office was right in a little end of the planer. And so when you have a bomb threat, I mean, we were learning. I have a little quote that I think is so good. "We build the road as we travel. So the journey begins." We had never learned in nurses training anything about bomb threats.

Ellen Leahy: Snus.

Julie Beckel: Or snus. And then we started chewing. (laughter) No, we didn't.

Ellen Leahy: I tried it.

Julie Beckel: Oh, did you?

Ellen Leahy: I tried it one night in the sawmill and that was enough for me.

Julie Beckel: She's the youngster that tried it. So we had this bomb threat and so the sheriff's - you can't use a radio during the time of a bomb threat 'cuz any kind of those waves could trigger something, the sound waves. So the cops, the sheriff's department, were supposed to come down to our nurses' office and try and figure out what was going on.

And it just so happened that the bomb threat came from the green end of plywood by the time clock. And as they got closer to it, they saw that there was actually some plastic by the time clock and some wires. I'm glad I didn't see it, but they did and they went, "Oh my goodness." So then they got the bomb guy out. So the guy in my office has got his shield and he's walking over there and I'm peeking out the window thinking, "I don't really want to see what's gonna happen, but I kind of want to see what's gonna happen". And so I'm peeking out the window and I see the guy get closer and then another car drives in and he stops. He puts up the trunk.

So both guys, you could see them talking behind here. Then they go in with this long cord or pipe, disconnect it from the time clock. Found out it wasn't a bomb. Then the guy waves, says, "Everything's fine." Meanwhile, we had evacuated the plywood plant. Everyone was out so that we knew there was nobody inside.

I think it was close to an end of a shift, so they actually got to go home. So then the cop comes back into the nurses' station and he says, "Boy, I'm glad that's over. I didn't have my glasses on. I couldn't see a damn thing." (laughter) I'm glad too.

Ellen Leahy: Just one thing, kind of a little bit of a zoom out from the mill. When you look back now and you look at, you know, the type of the paramedic response. And the qualified folks that we now have, at least in the urban areas, and that can come out here when you never really have that kind of response, rurally.

I mean, you still have the quick response units, thank God. You know, Potomac. And I remember one gal who worked, I can't think of her name, but she actually dove [into] Rainbow Curve, to Rainbow Bend to get somebody out of a truck. Remember the trucks used to go over there? I mean, those were the kind of people, men and women, that helped.

And when you look back now in the development... they were just starting some of the EMT training in the community. We went through that. We went through it. I mean, we'd been working in hospitals. We took the EMT training and then we went on to teach it. But one of the lessons I remember really well, and it does have a funny story associated with it, was Jim Connelly again.

And I said, you know, I hadn't had the EMT training yet. And I was like why don't you just have an ambulance? And he said because it would become a meat wagon. It would not be... you wouldn't have the trained staff who's... You'd have to take care of the guy. And he goes and he said, "We did have an ambulance." He told me it was real. I wish you guys could find it. 'Cuz it was... I remember seeing it. We were, at least myself, in the early stages, all of us, of learning field emergency response. All of us. And so he told me the story. He goes, "Before we had you guys and we did have the ambulance, I'd get to be the one that would drive it 'cuz I wasn't connected to production in any way." Key, key thought.

And he said, "I called the ER and said, 'I'm bringing in a guy with a splinter.' And they said, 'Okay, bring him in.' He goes, he had a splinter through his thigh, stabilized it with pillows, top and bottom, put him on the stretcher, ran into one of the many utility poles on the plant site. Knocked himself out. Honest to God, I'm not making this up. Jim Connelly. Knocked himself out. The guy's on the stretcher unattended. Jim Connelly's knocked out, bent over the wheel, you know. He says finally somebody came and drove him in for him. And then at that point, the ER doc said, "Splinter!" It was like (gestures a large size). So to me that was just a real eye-opening piece of imagery about how to learn how to do things right and, you know, do it right. Get help. Don't be a hero, but do it right.

[00:50:26] **Julie Beckel:** The one thing I know that a lot of the mill workers, especially the guys in the sawmill... and I know who you are. (laughter) You hated those hearing tests we had to do every year. The guys would come to the nurses' station and you know, we'd always encourage... "Let's try and prevent hearing loss. Wear those earplugs." "Well, then I can't hear you." Okay. "I can't hear if my machine is running right."

So it's hearing test time. And 'cuz we're nurses by trade, we figure as long as you're up here, let's check your blood pressure. Let's do a blood pressure screening too. So some of the guys would sit down and say, "I'm so pissed, I have to have this hearing test. I work in a noisy environment. I go hunting all the time. My hearing's bad, and now you wanna check my blood pressure."

And, you know, after that was said, it was a shared chuckle. And we'd just smile and we'd say, "And we're gonna repeat it next year too."

Ellen Leahy: And I think as a nurse, people present it differently. So, even though I worked intensive care, I would float down to ER and people would come in and say, "I've got this, or I've got that, or that's why I'm here." And they kind of just present it. You didn't have to figure it out totally. But here, it was sort of like, unless you got knocked down and we got called to the site, it was more you'd come up and kind of pretend you were there to josh around a little bit and you didn't really have a bad injury.

So what we'd have to do is watch the body language and, you know, if they were hiding their arm, it was probably their arm that was hurt. Or if they were leaning on the door jamb, it was probably a leg. But you wouldn't sort of admit that you were hurt, you were tougher than that. So that was kind of hard for me coming out of ...

And the other thing, I remember hearing my first set of healthy lungs out here 'cuz I'd worked intensive care. And somebody came up and thought they had flu. So I thought I'm good with lungs. I know I can describe all the breath sounds, all the... I can do it all. So I listened and I thought there was something wrong with them because it was like these really loud wind tunnels of air and these young, healthy guys, compared to intensive care. And it was just as a nurse, so different on every level for me from the moment they presented to the time you were done with the patient. So, that's all.

Julie Beckel: And I think the nice thing about this is we're all friends here and I do have a powerhouse story. I was real new and maybe like Ellen says, my first shift, it was an evening shift. In the security shack where the security guards were, they had a phone that was red and that was the number that when somebody dialed, that was an emergency.

So they pick up that phone, and Dave Butterfield was the security guard on the... On my radio he'd always call me Burse Kneckle instead of Nurse Beckel. And so he's going, "Burse Kneckle!" And I say, "Yeah." He goes, "You gotta go to the powerhouse right away. Somebody's hurt up there and take, and they said, bring all your tools." So I remember driving the green station wagon going, "All my tools." 'Cuz in the back of that is like a backboard, two heavy medical kits with ...

Ellen Leahy: fishing tackle box ...

Julie Beckel: dressings, that type of thing. And I'm going, tools. To get up to the powerhouse. It's all outside stairs. You're going up to the powerhouse. So I get up there and Bill Green, Frank Anthony, for those that know him. Funny guys. I walk in and Frank's standing there and, like, I look down at his leg and his, the whole bottom part of his leg is turned to the back. He's facing me, but this one part of the leg is turned to the back. So I'm going, you know, and he's not crying or saying he's hurting, and he's got this little grin on his face.

And I said, "I'm just not quite sure what's going on here." I said, "Does it hurt when you move it?" And he goes, "No." And so I said, "What do you want me to do?" And he said, "I told you to bring your tools." And I said, "Okay, I've... but I still don't know what to do with my tools." And he goes, "Oh, here. We have a tool kit." They give me the tools. Frank had an artificial leg (laughter) and he had taken the screws that he'd loosened 'em so he could spin his leg to the back. So I watched them use their tools to put it back together.

[00:55:05] **Ellen Leahy:** Yeah, I learned to fish here when it wasn't busy. I learned to weld here when it wasn't busy. I learned to play poker here when it wasn't busy. But when it was busy, you know, it was feast or famine. But I just want to share my fondest memory and then we'll open it to questions. Has nothing to do with the work itself, but it had to do with the beautiful setting.

'Cuz I work a night shift, I would see the sun come up if I wasn't asleep on the gurney, which I, as you know, occasionally was. But they could always reach me. I remember sitting out right where the chip trucks would come in. I'd only have to get up every now and then 'cuz in the middle of the night you don't get that many chip trucks, but you still get 'em right at the main gate before they moved the office. And I watched a full sky of northern lights for, I don't know. My head was cranked back. I mean, I sat there in the middle of the night, one late August, and watched a full sky of northern lights for over an hour. And I took every blanket in that place so I could stay out there.

And I just will never forget that. Or the smell of sawdust. Or a lot of your faces. It's so wonderful to see you. We want to hear your stories and questions and we can take the mic away 'cuz we could go on forever.

Julie Beckel: Any, yeah, go ahead.

Kim Briggeman: Can you guys introduce each other?

Julie Beckel: No. Introduce each other?

Kim Briggeman: Yeah, I don't think anybody ...

Julie Beckel: I'm sorry.

Ellen Leahy: I'm Ellen Leahy and I currently work at the Missoula City County Health Department. I said I made a full turn to public health, but was the first night nurse out here. Julie Beckel was the second swing shift. Kim, you may not know what swing shift is. You gotta know what that is. Okay. It's the afternoon shift. So I relieved her. And she worked here, what, 11 years?

Julie Beckel: 11, 12 years.

Ellen Leahy: You went on to Daily, didn't you go on to Daily's (Meats?)

Julie Beckel: Yep.

Ellen Leahy: She also worked EAP (Health Care Trust Employee Assistance Program?)

Julie Beckel: Yep. Julie Beckel.

Ellen Leahy: B-e-c-k-e-l.

Julie Beckel: You bet.

Ellen Leahy: Get it right.

Julie Beckel: And now I'm retired, taking care of my grandbaby. And so I'm enjoying all of that time. But we will open it up to questions. Anything that you have. Yep.

Jim Habeck: I was taking off my mind when Ellen mentioned something. The Butte and the mine dust; Columbia Falls was the fluoride; and then Libby with the asbestos. I don't think anybody's touched on the career-long, not the splinter, whatever.

Ellen Leahy: Right.

Jim Habeck: But the long term, 30-year employees walking with a bad cough. And they say, I need a drink at the tap or something.

Ellen Leahy: Right.

Jim Habeck: But chronic respiratory...

Ellen Leahy: Right. When we met ahead of time and started sharing stories, I said, you know, and I said earlier, I was impressed with how they started thinking more preventatively and in terms of exposures to things other than those that could cause immediate trauma. I have to tell you, we didn't think, at least the short period of time I was here, we didn't think about that much. I mean, once you wash the substance outta somebody's eyes, they're good to go, you know, once they healed up. The only chronic injuries, and, of course, memory fails me 'cuz it's a long time ago now, that were recognized were, again more, oh, I don't want to say they weren't due to exposure. They were due to repetitive motion. So clearly repetitive motion injuries were being recognized by Workers' Comp. But the short time I was here, and in that period of time, I think in, even in the existence of this program, we didn't look at that. Now, Julie did. She started... they started looking at those things.

Julie Beckel: Unfortunately, we... if you think about working around all the dust, those fine pieces. We did have masks that people could wear, but it wasn't mandatory. And hindsight's 2020. Why wasn't that mandatory? What we usually saw is if somebody was a mill worker and they came with an existing medical problem, like asthma, history of pneumonia, they might be the ones that are more sensitive to that. And if that happened, they just went to see their doctor that treated them for their asthma. You know, there were times when... the Work Comp law has changed so many times. They referred to it the Blue Book, and then it was the "old, old" Blue Book that it was hard to really keep tabs on how a Work Comp provider would see this case.

And I just lost my train of thought... That was seen as an aggravation of a medical condition. Not caused by the work environment, but it was an aggravation of a medical condition. So Work Comp would accept it for what is the length of time you're in the plant? How many days a week do you work there to try? To try to figure out what percentage of your whole person that could be contributed to a Work Comp claim.

[01:00:24] **Jim Habeck:** I was thinking about say a 25-year or 30-year career and the retirement is four to five years and the doctor says, "Died of pneumonia." When in fact it was a chronic thing acquired on the job.

Ellen Leahy: Or if you look at just here in town, the White Pine site. They worked with wood too, but they dipped it. It was those dip tanks and those workers ... There was a look back for those workers because of that exposure. We didn't, at least in my time. MSDS sheets weren't even required when I was here. Material Safety Data Sheets.

One thing I want to mention is the women that worked in the mill, and some of 'em, especially on my shift, there weren't many, but they were young and so they were childbearing age. There were women that worked on the green chain, worked in the dryers out there pregnant. And that's hard. And there were also opinions about whether that should or shouldn't go on at that time. I remember one foreman, he wanted a pregnant woman - she was like five or

six months - he wanted her off her floor. She needed to work, but he didn't want her on the floor pregnant. And then you'd have others who did have just the basic issues of pregnancy, your feet get fat and you're tired and your stomach's in the way. And there really wasn't a lot then to think about how to accommodate that. Those were very hard jobs for everyone, certainly for those women.

Unknown speaker: Was the union sympathetic with women?

Ellen Leahy: The union was sympathetic, supportive and protective of its members.

Julie Beckel: No matter what the gender was.

Ellen Leahy: Yeah, they really were. But the culture, and even, you know, again, zoom out. We as a society hadn't really dealt much with whether women should even be working, let alone in a sawmill and being pregnant. So you'd end up with a lot of different personal opinions on how you ought to deal with that, but really rough when you think of it. And I, you know, you give us all this credit for coming into a culture that was different. But I'll tell you, I wasn't working, pulling green chain as a woman and that I can only recognize how very different that must have been. Yep. Dennis

Dennis Sain: Just one comment that after the nurses came, they came up to Twin Creeks and Helen (Homme), and I think all of you came to Twin Creeks a couple of times. That is when we got a first aid kit in every truck. That is one thing. We only had maybe one first aid kit on the job, but after that we got [a] first aid kit in every truck.

Julie Beckel: And I think we were also able to get you EpiPens in case someone was having an allergic reaction to a bee. Because when you're way up there, you better have some tools.

Dennis Sain: Yeah. We had several guys that were allergic and everybody was taught how to shoot 'em, use that. Yeah.

Julie Beckel: I also know in one of the classes, I'm glad you said that. In the event of an emergency, they'd call the security office and one of the security guards would call Life Flight. And so one of the things we had to teach these guys was how you set up a landing zone, so that the Life Flight would know it was okay to land there. I mean, you didn't have to worry about wires overhead 'cuz they weren't wires up there, but you had to figure out that landing zone and park your trucks in the corner and shine the lights so that he knew where to land. So that was ... I mean, we learned just as much, we learned as much from you folks as you learned from us. It was a combined effort and, thank God, we all worked together good.

Ellen Leahy: Yeah, we did. It's wonderful. It's like one of my fondest, fondest memories. In my career and in my life.

Julie Beckel: Lots of, I mean, we grew up at the mill with you guys. I had my baby in '81 and pregnancy in the mill. And that was seen as a disability, so I got to take a disability leave when I had my baby.

Ellen Leahy: Okay. I promise this is the last thing. It was here that I learned that men... a guy will never tell you he's gonna pass out.

Julie Beckel: That's true. Never.

Ellen Leahy: A girl says, "Oh, I don't feel so good." You know, maybe you wanna lay down, put your head between your knees. But a guy... you'd be pulling something out of his hand and forget to look up at his face and he'd clunk on the floor. So if that's sexist, I'm sorry, but it was a good clinical skill that I learned here.

[01:05:07] **Julie Beckel:** Any other questions, comments?

Glenn Max Smith: I got a comment on the guy thing.

Julie Beckel: Here we go. Here we go.

Glenn Max Smith: It was Julie and I that.... Let's see. My wife Sharon and myself went to a (unclear) class to recreate wounds so we could give a better safety. Okay. We picked chainsaw and, boy, I'll tell you, nothing nastier than a chainsaw. Sawdust filings, oil, bark, moss, you name it, it's going to get in there. So we set this up. I think it was on your arm, wasn't it?

Julie Beckel: Could have been.

Glenn Max Smith: Yeah, I think it was Julie's arm. We set up and the more I created this, even though I know it was mortician wax, the more we created, the more ... [shakes head. laughter]

Julie Beckel: I used to have that arterial bleed. Remember, you'd put under your arm and you'd pump. It was like Saturday Night Live, you know?

Glenn Max Smith: To go with that we had a shift change of the night watchman. And this fellow came in and he set his lunch bucket down and was in the process of going in the back room to hang up his hat and coat. And he seen Julie's arm tore all to hell and she... He started walking and then Julie grabbed him and says, "It's okay! It's fake!" (laughter) Guided him into the corner...

Julie Beckel: Down he went.

You know, and I guess just one thing we should say that we did have some serious injuries, and it's always hard to talk about those. But when you work in the mill there [is] a lot of machinery, a lot of equipment, and you can really get hurt bad. And so it wasn't like it was all fun and games.

Ellen Leahy: Oh no.

Julie Beckel: You know, we were ...

Ellen Leahy: Fun and games I think help you cope with it.

Julie Beckel: Yeah. Yep. We were very serious about our jobs. Always liked to have a good time with them, but some of the injuries we saw that were debilitating or deadly, those are the ones that you remember too. I'm glad we've got safety practices in place now.

Ellen Leahy: Oh yeah. Huge difference. Real credit to you that you carried on.

Glenn Max Smith: I have another comment. These ladies helped us not only in the mill, but also out of the mill site. I was in a quick response unit and one thing that would scared the hell out of a guy is emergency childbirth. And I talked to Helen, I've talked to these ladies in the way of about how in the devil would I ever, can I do this?

Oh yeah, you'll do it. It's a natural thing. What they neglected to tell me was my number came up out at Clinton, and what they did tell me worked perfect. Get the OB kit, prepare, you know, the lady delivering, do all that. But what they didn't cover, and I don't think anybody could, was the fact that they lived in a trailer house that wasn't skirted. And under that trailer was two Doberman Pinchers who hated anything that had a Red Cross on it or anything that drove up with a bunch of weird flashing lights. So we would go in and... this was kind of a bad scene. The poor little tyke was born. He had Down syndrome. It worked out. We delivered the child.

But I'll tell you, getting past those Doberman Pinchers and getting out to our rig to get more equipment as it was needed was a real treat. But you know, I would still probably have passed out with the Doberman Pinchers if these guys hadn't helped me through some of the issues that I had when I was learning how to do this. So I take my hat off to you guys for that.

Ellen Leahy: In return, you guys taught us how to use Bag Balm as the most effective salve, which is another thing we did not learn in nursing school. So I still do.

Julie Beckel: And I guess with all due respect, I wrote down some of the names of the nurses that we had in case you wanted to remember some of them.

Helen Homme was the pioneer, along with Edith Thibodeau, which was Tibby. Ellen. We had Anne-Marie McCormick, a little redhead from the Bronx, and she'd tell you what was right and what was wrong. Connie Clark Johnson. Lucy Heintz. Carla Verworn. Doreen Burlingame, and Jackie Newberry. We all worked well together and I will... I was wishing the person was here, but he isn't.

[01:09:57] But I'll share a story with you. The supervisors in the plywood plant had been at a CPR class and a first aid class and we would do those annually so that you could practice the respirations with Annie 'cuz if you don't practice those, you forget how much you can blow and where you do the compressions. And I'll be danged if not too long ago, one of the big guys went down at the mill and one of the green-end supervisors did CPR and saved his life. Those are the types of things we like to hear and, you know, it makes us realize that all the time we thought they weren't listening, they were listening. It was great.

Thank you.

Several speakers: Thanks.

Julie Beckel: And nurses always like to write stuff down. (refers to her notes)

Minie Smith: Anybody else have any questions or comments? Thanks to Julie and Ellen very much. And Glenn. And we'll hope you'll participate in some of the later Bonner history events that are on the back of the program.

And this will be the last Roundtable for this season, but we will hopefully do some more in the fall. And invite you all to stop by the little history center that we have, which now has, I think, has a new roof so it's not leaking anymore. (applause) This is a great improvement and it's open Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday afternoons from 2 to 4:30 so stop by and see us and bring your memories there. Thank you all for coming. There's cake and coffee in the back and enjoy it. (applause)

(Outro music and credits)



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