

*Think your family is bad?*

# Check out the skeletons (bigamists, murderers and cons, oh my) in this Butte family's closet

by **Peggy Marquis**, reporter  
Photos by **Ashley Makowski**

She'd heard the old family stories for years, but it wasn't until returning to Butte for her aunt's funeral that author Christy Leskovar heard the tale that would change her life.

Rumor had it that her great-grandmother Sarah Hughes was accused of murdering her husband in Forsyth, Montana in the early 1900s.

Although familiar with the woman she describes as a cross between Auntie Mame and Fagin, it was a story Leskovar hadn't heard before. She returned home to Las Vegas but the stories kept swimming in her head.

Curiosity sparked, Leskovar called the District Court Clerk in Rosebud County and asked, "Do you have any record of Sarah Hughes being accused of murder?"

The answer was no.

Leskovar called back within minutes and asked, "Do you have any record of Sarah Hughes being accused of anything?"

This time the answer was yes.

Hughes was well known to law enforcement, and not just in Rosebud County. Nearly one hundred years later, the woman's shady past would lead her great-granddaughter on an eight year search for the truth behind family stories she had grown up with.

That search gave birth to Leskovar's book, *One Night In a Bad Inn*.

"Hurricane Sarah" opened the Anna Hughes Boarding House in Butte in 1915, under one of many aliases she used. Her daughter,

**"Back then, when you moved to Butte you lost your reputation."**

*Leskovar's grandmother on the early days of Montana*

Leskovar's grandmother, used to say, "Back then, when you moved to Butte you lost your reputation."

It was in Sarah's boarding house that her son Archie Hughes and boarder Roy Walsh formed a lame-brained scheme to rob merchant Albert Johnson in his store at Renova, southeast of Whitehall. When the botched robbery resulted in Johnson's death, the two men were captured, and prosecuted and sentenced in the historic Jefferson County courthouse in Boulder.

Walsh's death by hanging on February 14, 1925, carried out at

the Boulder jail, was the last legal hanging in Jefferson County.

That history was the focus of an August 14 tour.

The tour and dinner arranged by the 21st Century Community Learning Center and the Jefferson County Heritage Society began with a bus ride from Helena, stops at the Clancy museum and Tizer Gardens, and a brief walking tour of historic Boulder houses and buildings mentioned in Leskovar's book.

Dinner was provided at the Boulder Elementary School by 21st CCLC staff, and the tour concluded at the courthouse, in the same District Courtroom where Walsh and Hughes were tried.

About thirty people arrived to hear Leskovar read from her book, and local historian Ellen Rae Thiel mentioned that she has



**Christy Leskovar**

talked with people who are using the book as a vacation guide.

Memorabilia pertaining to the Walsh and Hughes trials is on display in the hallway outside the second-floor District Courtroom, including the bullet that took Johnson's life.

Leskovar, who holds degrees in mechanical engineering and French, eventually quit her job of fifteen years at Bechtel in Seattle to pursue the research and writing of her book. Quotes in the book

are taken directly from trial transcripts and from Walsh's confession. She also uses information from the Montana penal code of that period, Governor's notes relating to Walsh's appeal, and newspaper accounts. She says the decision to write a book about her family just popped into her head one day, before she really knew what happened, and the experience was like living in a novel.

As for Sarah Hughes' poor dead husband and how he came to be that way, and the husband no one knew about, and more of Sarah's questionable criminal enterprises, those tales are shared in Leskovar's book. The book is in the Boulder Community Library collection and is also available for sale in bookstores and on the internet through the book website at [onenightinabadinn.com](http://onenightinabadinn.com).



**Ellen Rae Thiel and Nancy Alley, in Heritage Center t-shirts, wait outside the Jefferson County courthouse as the tour group assembles. Right, author Leskovar, in white shirt, listens as Thiel recounts some local history.**



*You are personally invited...*

to come hear Mike Majewski, a noted authority on municipal economic development, speak on economic development specifically for the Boulder Area. After sharing his expertise, Mr. Majewski will gladly answer any questions and be available for personal conversations.

**Saturday, September 8 at 6:30 p.m.**  
**at St. Catherine's Catholic Church Meeting Hall**  
**214 S. Elder, Boulder, Montana**

*The Jefferson County Spay and Neuter Clinic will be having a dessert by the slice sale for donations during the presentation.*

**Sponsored by Boulder Horizons program and Jefferson Local Development Corporation.**

**Whitehall Concrete Plant**  
**4-RIVERS CONCRETE PRODUCTS INC.**

Front Discharge Trucks  
 Ready Mix Concrete  
 Sand & Gravel/  
Landscape Rock  
with Delivery Available

*"Radio Dispatched"*

**Orders 287-3728 • Shop 287-9197**  
**Toll-free 1-866-842-5735**

## Manage home resources to prepare for emergencies

by **Sally Buckles**  
Jefferson County Disaster and Emergency Services Coordinator

Although you may not be asked to evacuate – and even if your are – disasters can isolate you from outside help and make it necessary for you to care for yourself for days at a time. Your disaster supply kit will contain many of the tools and supplies you need. Here are other ways to use and manage the resources you have at your home.

### WATER

Water is crucial for health and survival. If a disaster is imminent, fill pitchers, jars, buckets, water bottles and your bathtub in case your community water supply is cut off.

If your drinking water supply is running low, use water from ice cube trays, the water heater and toilet tanks. It is not safe to use

**PLANNING SMART**  
**PLANNING AHEAD**

the water from radiators, waterbeds or swimming pools. If you use all the water from your water tank, turn off the pilot light or disconnect the electricity to keep it from burning up.

Each person should drink at least two quarts of water each day. Drink what you need each day and look for more water for the next day.

### FOOD

Ration food supplies for everyone except children and pregnant women. Most people can survive easily on half the normal amount. Avoid eating food from dented or swollen cans or food that looks or smells abnormal. Use pre-prepared formula for babies.

### IF THE POWER GOES OUT

- Practice energy conservation to help your power company avoid rolling blackouts.
- Always keep your car's fuel tank at least half full – gas stations use electricity to operate pumps.
- Know how to manually release your electric garage door.

- Protect your computer with a surge protector.

- If the power goes out, check around to see if the outage is limited to your own home. Turn off computers, stereos, televisions and appliances you were using with the power went off. Leave one light turned on so you know when power is restored.

- Avoid opening the refrigerator and freezer doors. Food will remain fresh up to four hours after the power goes off. If you know power outages may happen, freeze water in plastic bottles to keep food cool longer.

- If the outage is expected to last for several days or more, consider relocating to a shelter or a friend's home.

- Do not burn charcoal or gas grills in the house.

- If you plan to use a generator, operate it outside only – not in the basement or garage. Do not hook it up directly to your home's wiring. Instead, connect the equipment and appliances you want to power directly to the outlets on the generator.