

Welcome to Mining City Reflections where we illuminate the history of Butte, Montana through the stories and observations of 20<sup>th</sup> century women who lived there. I'm your host, Marian Jensen.

In today's episode we'll hear from Rose Marie Johnson who worked in food service in Butte and belonged to the Women's Protective Union for forty years. She eventually served on its Executive Board. Her oral history was taken in December, 1995 by Whitney Williams, director of the Butte Archives' Labor History project.

The interview focuses on Rose Marie's life as a working wife and mother particularly in the 1950s and 60's, and her dedication to the Women's Protective Union. Johnson's story is a common one in an era of limited access to birth control where women went in and out of the work force in between bearing children. While such work might seem inconsequential to some, her simple dignity and dedication in doing a job well makes her story memorable.

Rose Marie Johnson

Rose was a cook her entire life in Butte. She worked at Gamer's, Meaderville's Vegas Club, Sully's Truck Stop, 4B's, Lydia's, The Moxom, Martha's, Lloyd's, Kingsburger, Montana Tech and finally the Silver Bow County Jail. A woman whose family said she was the happiest in the kitchen with her apron on, she also paid keen attention to her work environment and felt a desire and responsibility to protect her rights on the job.

32:05-32:08 -the Union was your best Friend.

In the Mood - Glenn Miller - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yRloEtE8cII>

Rose Marie was born in Butte in 1930 into a family of eleven children. After high school she married in 1947 and entered the workforce soon after. Joining the Women's Protective Union, she started her first job as a dishwasher at Gamer's, one of the city's best known restaurants. After World War II, Butte was booming. 3:00-3:12

Every Day Buddy Holly <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLBWkM0jzK0>

Hopeful of building their own home, Rose Marie and her husband, who worked at the Anaconda Mining Company smelter in the nearby

company town of Anaconda, worked toward that goal for two years. When Rose Marie became pregnant, her boss would not allow her to work. But that didn't relieve Rose Marie of her picketing obligations during the ensuing strike.

7:58-9:12

Picket Line song <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E8KIKTZqp0g>

The Women's Protective Union only struck once, but their efforts were successful. She remembers the local support the union received.

10:20-33;11:07-11:19

Pete Seeger - We shall not be moved - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HmkoQXyj\\_NY&list=PL4D1CD2F32801CC4D&index=9](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HmkoQXyj_NY&list=PL4D1CD2F32801CC4D&index=9)

After the birth of her second child, the Union helped Rose Marie get back to work as a cook.

16:17-37

The cycle of time off for her children and then finding another job afterward was facilitated by her younger sisters. One of the advantages of coming from that large family was the availability of baby sitters, childcare being a perennial challenge for all working mothers.

14:07-14:22

Mothers and Children - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0D\\_yIC10B1c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0D_yIC10B1c)

Start at :31

Rose Marie had worked in enough Butte cafes to know her share of legendary owners. One that Rose Marie remembered fondly was Martha Caldwell who owned, you guessed it, Martha's Cafe. Across from the Front Street train station, the Cafe was a popular spot for travelers, railway workers, and late night drinkers looking for breakfast after the bars closed.

17:50-18:24 (remove interviewer's question)

Tuxedo Junction/ Chattanooga Choo Cho - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IR\\_Emp6xV7w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IR_Emp6xV7w)

In 1974 with the help of the Union, Rose Marie got a job in the Dining Services of the local college, then known at the Montana School of Mines. There she learned about catering and had a glimpse of a career she might have had if only she'd had the opportunity for training.

42:33- 43

43:23-56

Bread - Make it With You - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Km5mePMYf8>

observe the Woman's Protective Union leadership at work.

22:41-23:56; 24:02-24.

I am Woman - Helen Reddy. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xwMOC5i2eRk>

Regular attendance at Union meetings undoubtedly contributed to its membership's solidarity — partly by design and partly through the camaraderie developed on the job.

25:52-26:46;

28:42-29:35

And these meetings were not for the general public.

26:58-27:27

1:09:50-1:10:52

Following the Women's Protective Union's forced merger with the Hotel and Restaurant Employees local, the strength of the union began to wane. With the Union's battle for rights in the distant past, younger members did not see the value of the organization. Paying dues seemed an imposition. Meanwhile, Rose Marie remained faithful to the values earned through solidarity.

Rose Marie Johnson

29:42-30:10

30:42-31:10

31:33-31:58

The Dawning of the Age of Aquarius <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VlrQ-bOzpkQ>

When the WPU was required to merge in 1973, Rose Marie Johnson favored the merger. By then she had been in the union for 25 years. While they didn't need more members, she knew that when men entered a profession finally the pay scale would go up. Invariably, changes in leadership occurred as well. When men took over, leadership waned, and membership dropped, never to return.

1:06:45-1:07:08

Bread and Roses - instrumental

Rose Marie Johnson's waitressing career spanned three decades, from the heyday of Butte's mining economy after World War II and into the years of the country's burgeoning economy. Always alternating day and afternoon shifts with her husband, they raised 7 children which lead to 8

Rose Marie Johnson

grandchildren;10 great grandchildren; and 1 great-great grandchild.

Surrounded by her extensive family, she died in 2019 at age 89.

1:28:09 -1:28:52 - laughter

The self-confidence and fortitude of today's working women are fruits born of the esprit de corps of working mothers like Rose Marie Johnson.

