

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

This episode highlights the working life of Val Webster who quite literally grew up in the Women's Protective Union. At age four she accompanied her mother and other WPU members to the funeral of Frank Little, an organizer for the International Workers of the World with whom the women's union was affiliated, and who was lynched during the Butte miners' strike in 1917.

Beethoven Sym #3 - first 30 seconds. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=arfHsnxE-MU>

57:20 - I'm union all the way through.

At the time of the oral history interview, Valentine Kenney Webster had been involved with the Women's Protective Union for more than fifty years — having served in every office. Born to Irish immigrants in Butte in 1913, once the Great Depression hit, Val left school and went to work

Webster

washing dishes at the Silver Bow Cafe, joining the union in 1929. She loved it.

Ted Lewis - Headin' For Better Times

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5FL5r165nJ8&list=PLLCbPm5UsSW1pPdRWHZqJcVo9KR7jGGGn&index=7)

[v=5FL5r165nJ8&list=PLLCbPm5UsSW1pPdRWHZqJcVo9KR7jGGGn&index=7](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5FL5r165nJ8&list=PLLCbPm5UsSW1pPdRWHZqJcVo9KR7jGGGn&index=7)

9:08-9:46.

To protect its members, the Union adhered to the strict segregation of work that prevented exploitation of the workers. A cook was a cook, and not a waitress and vice versa. The Union's business agent, women like the legendary Bridget Shea, regularly visited work sites to remind both members and employers of this. Val learned this lesson early on, the hard way.

Billie Holiday - God Bless the Child <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bKNtP1zOVHw>

52:43-55:32

Webster

Working at the Union Grill, a 24 hr restaurant, meant catering to the many single miners in Butte. The restaurant not only served meals in house but also provided the miners with 'bucket' lunches.

11:02-11:38; 12:07-12:49; 17:00-18:03.

Ella - It's Only a Paper Moon <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZluDkuqVflc>

For many single miners, a favored restaurant became like a second home. Newly arrived miners relied on the restaurant to stake them until their first pay check.

We're in the Money - Ginger Rogers <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJOjTNuuEVw&list=PLLCbPm5UsSW1pPdRWHZqJcVo9KR7jGGGn&index=6>

23:12-45 (remove interviewer's comments)

The need for waitresses and restaurant workers was so great in Butte in the early days that men also worked as waiters, often paid twice as much, though Val thought the level of their commitment to the job left something to be desired.

25:16-25:40

Webster

Happy Days are Here Again <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqsT4xnKZPg>

Early on, learning from her mother, Val became devoted to the Union, and enjoyed the camaraderie of the members born of their shared experience.

Judy Garland - I Got Rhythm <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZAKPQ1Hzcek>

28:27-29:26 (edit Mary's comments)

48:07-28

In awe of its ability to enforce its will in the work place, Val seemed destined to become an officer in the Union. Even as a new member, she was fascinated by the inner workings of the organization on display at the meetings.

Benny Goodman - Sing, Sing, Sing

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2S1L_jen6A&list=PL9FE671118F78E7A6

Webster

29:43-30:12 (edit Mary's comments)

By 1936 Val had become recording secretary for the Union's Executive Board, which only whetted her appetite for more involvement. Married to a miner but without children, she eventually took on the labor intensive position of Business Agent, a paid staff position which she held for sixteen years. As part of that job, she visited every working member at her employer on an ongoing basis.

Leroy Anderson -The Syncopated Clock https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fQPLrVC8PTQ&list=PLx8kU_D2e4vp4suZewD9EC9eOLJMADu-2&index=7

36:42-52

Val was a big believer in the informal approach to problem-solving. If a particular employer was a source of problems, she preferred to sit over a cup of coffee and work things out.

Webster

Tommy Dorsey - Tea for Two [https://www.youtube.com/watch?](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p2Ub05MDci4&list=PLx8kU_D2e4vp4suZewD9EC9eOLJMADu-2&index=69)

[v=p2Ub05MDci4&list=PLx8kU_D2e4vp4suZewD9EC9eOLJMADu-2&index=69](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p2Ub05MDci4&list=PLx8kU_D2e4vp4suZewD9EC9eOLJMADu-2&index=69)

38:31- 39:14

Val continued as business agent during the era when family restaurants began to face competition from franchise operations, many of which were non-union in other parts of the state.

Different arrangement of Tea for Two: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vN2PoYUnPFY)

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39:24-40:40

Val Webster grew up in Butte during the heyday of its unions' successes, protecting the working lives of its members. With only minimal formal education, she rose to the highest position in the union, and made a lasting impact on the women she was so dedicated to serving. She also lived long enough to witness the decline of those same unions. Val died in 1983 at the age of 80.

Webster

Through her efforts in retirement, the Butte Archives acquired and now maintain extensive records, photographs and memorabilia from the Women's Protective Union. In recognition of her commitment to the preservation of this unique history, the holdings were named in her honor — the Valentine Kenney Webster Labor History Collection.

48:07 "It was friendship...48:20 It was wonderful.

