BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Valentine Kenney Webster (1913-)

Val Webster is a native of Butte. Both her parents were Irish immigrants who met and married in Butte. Her mother worked in a boarding house, her father was a miner. Her mother and aunts were members of the original Women's Protective Union, her father of the Butte Miners' Union. As she says, she comes from a "real union family."

Val Webster started working in 1929, washing dishes at the Silver Bow Cafe. A year later she was hired as a waitress at the Union Grill and worked there for twenty years. She joined the Women's Protective Union in 1929, was appointed recording secretary in 1936, and later became business agent, a position she held for over sixteen years. She takes pride in the fact that the union had no strikes during her period of office.

In 1956 she married Arthur C. Webster, a shaft miner; they had no children.

BUTTE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

TAPE INDEX

Interviewee: Webster Val
Last First Middle
Date of Interview: February 24, 1980
Place: Butte
Interviewer: Mary Murphy

Context of the Interview: The interview took place in Mrs. Webster's one room apartment. I had talked with Mrs. Webster at the union office the week before so we chatted a bit about that while the landlord fixed her thermostat. After he left and the laundry was retrieved from the dryer down the hall, we began the interview. Mrs. Webster was very open, seemed quite comfortable, even forgot the tape was on as she told some stories. After the interview was over we discussed the present state of labor, and she invited me to come down to the office and make use of the journals and records and to return for the answers to any other questions I might have.

Tape #1
Side A

She was born on Valentine's Day, 1913 of Irish parents. Mother came in 1900, her aunt brought her over. Then went to work in the boarding house, where she met her husband, a miner. Mrs. Webster's father later became shift boss in the Black Rock Mine. Both parents came over within a month of each other. Father died in 1919 from cerebral hemorhage. Mother remarried an Austrian man in 1921. Stepfather never had any children. Was a wonderful man.

Val went to work in 1929 washing dishes. Her older brother had gone to work in the mines when was thirteen. First worked about a year in the Silver Bow cafe, then to the Union Grill on Park Street. Worked there for twenty yrs. Worked with Theresa McCarthy and Kathleen Dougherty, still the best of friends.

Mother didn't work while she was married. Had gone back to work when husband died, at the boarding house. That is where she met second husband, also a miner. He died from silicosis. Was a raise miner, worked on contract. Must have loved the work because he stayed with it till he couldn't do it any more. Had a chance for watchman's job and boss', but never took them. Broke in hundreds of men with himself as partner. Worked at the Belmont for many yrs., at the Anselmo, Black Rock, Elm Orlu, Leonard, Tramway, E. & W. Colusa.

Rustled work at the gate, hired by the foremen. Worked on a raise until it was completed, then put on another. Must have worked twenty-five yrs. in the Belmont. "He was sure a good man, just loved him." The only dad she ever really knew, her father had died when she was 6.

Mother was a waitress and chambermaid. Always worked in the Mullin House. Mrs. Webster got her own first job. Went to the Bell Employment Agency. Paid a dollar or fifty cents to get a job. Man at the restaurant knew her. When Sarah Michaels, then business agent for the union would come around, she would duck and he'd say she was his babysitter, which she was. Good boss. Greek people, most of the restaurants here were run by Greek people. Fabulous people to work for.

First went to work made 5 dollars a week for an indefinite number of hours, never had no set time. Then didn't belong to the union.

Butte Oral History Project

LIFE HISTORY

PLEASE PRINT
****

me: Webster (Last) Valentine (First) Catherine (Middle) Kenney (Maiden) Sex: ____ Race: ____

rrent Address: 103 E. Broadway (Street) Butte (Town) Silver Bow (County) Montana (State) 59701 (Zip Code)

lephone: (406) 792-8620 Birthplace: Butte DOB: Feb 14, 1913

ars of School: 5th Church Membership: ____

andparents:	DOB	Birthplace	Yrs of School	Occupation(s)	DOM	DOD
Fa:						
Mo:						
Fa:						
Mo:						

cents:	DOB	Birthplace	Yrs of School	Occupation(s)	DOM	DOD
: Patrick Kenney		Ireland		miner		
: Winifred Kenna		Ireland		waitress, chambermaid		
stepfather Michael Klyuevsek		Austria		miner		

blings (in order of birth):

Name	Sex	DOB	Birthplace	Yrs of School	Occupation(s)	DOM	DOD
Patrick							
Valentine							
Mary							
Dan							

cupational History (List jobs in order): Date of First Employment: ____

Position	Company	Dates

ouse:	DOB	Birthplace	Yrs of School	Occupation(s)	DOM	DOD
Arthur C Webster		Butte		shaft miner	1956	1970 (?)

ildren (in order of birth):

Name	Sex	DOB	Birthplace	Yrs of School	Occupation(s)	DOM	DOD
none							

INTERVIEWEE AGREEMENT

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

BUTTE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The purpose of this program is to gather and preserve information for historical and scholarly use.

A tape recording of your interview will be made by the interviewer, and a typescript of the tape will be made and submitted to you for editing. The final typescript, together with the tape of the interview will then be placed in the oral history collection at the University of Montana. Other institutions or persons may obtain a copy. These materials may be made available for purposes of research, for instructional use, for publications, or for other related purposes.

* * * * * * * * *

I, VAL WEBSTER, have read the
(Interviewee. Please print)
above, and in view of the historical and scholarly value of this information, and in return for a final typed copy of the transcript, I knowingly and voluntarily permit the University of Montana the full use of this information. I hereby grant and assign all my rights of every kind whatever pertaining to this information, whether or not such rights are now known, recognized, or contemplated, to the University of Montana.

Val Webster
Interviewee (Signature)

May 8 - 1980
Date

INTERVIEWER AGREEMENT

University of Montana
Missoula

BUTTE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

I, Mary Murphy (Interviewer (please print)), in view of the historical and scholarly value of the information contained in the interview with Val Webster (Interviewee (please print)), knowingly and voluntarily permit the University of Montana the full use of this information, and hereby grant and assign to the University of Montana all rights of every kind whatever pertaining to this information, whether or not such rights are now known, recognized or contemplated.

Mary Murphy
Interviewer (Signature)

5-12-80
Date

The University of Montana at Missoula

Oral History Collection

Interview

with

VALENTINE CATHERINE KENNEY WEBSTER

February 24, 1980

Butte, Montana

By Mary Murphy

Transcribed by Jean Houston

Mary Murphy: Oh, Valentine's Day.

Valentine Kenney Webster: Yes. Two Irish parents.

MM: Had your parents been born here in Butte?

WEBSTER: No, my parents were born in Ireland.

MM: When did they come here?

WEBSTER: My mother came here in 1900. I'm sure it was 1900. My aunt brought her over from Ireland and paid her way over. Then she went to work in the boarding house, and that's where she met my dad.

MM: Was he a miner?

WEBSTER: My dad was a miner, and then he was a shift boss at the Black Rock Mine.

MM: How long had he been here?

WEBSTER: He was just the same length of time my mother was here. They both came over within a month of each other. Then they were married. My dad died in 1919 from a cerebral hemorrhage, and my mother got married again to an Austrian man in 1921.

MM: How old was she when she was first married?

WEBSTER: I know she wasn't eighteen.

MM: So she was just a girl when she came over.

WEBSTER: Yes. And my stepdad was the best man that ever walked in two shoes. He was Austrian. He never had any children, and he took care of us kids until I went to work. The Depression was in '29, and I went to work washing dishes.

MM: You were the oldest?

WEBSTER: No, I have a brother that's older than me. He went to work in the mines when he was thirteen.

MM: Oh, my gosh.

WEBSTER: And I went working washing dishes, and I stood on the old prune box washing the dishes because I wasn't big enough.

MM: Which boarding house was this in?

WEBSTER: That wasn't a boarding house; that was a restaurant down on Utah. It was the Silver Bow Cafe. I worked there for about a year, and then I went to work in the Union Grill, and that was just right down here on Park Street. I worked there for twenty years with Theresa McCarty and Kathleen Dougherty. The three of us worked together, and we're still the best of friends.

MM: Did your mother stay working after she was married?

WEBSTER: No, neither time. My mother never worked after she was married.

MM: Did she go back to work after your father died, before she remarried?

WEBSTER: Yes. She went to work in a boarding house and a rooming house, and that's where she met my stepdad.

MM: Was he also a miner?

WEBSTER: Yes, and he was a miner until he died from silicosis.

MM: How old was he?

WEBSTER: He was sixty. . . . Let's see, how old am I? I'm sixty-seven. He'd be over eighty now.

MM: So he worked underground?

WEBSTER: Yes, he was a contract miner, a raise miner.

MM: So they dug out the raises?

WEBSTER: Yes.

MM: Did he like that work? Did he ever talk about it?

WEBSTER: He must have loved it, because he stayed with it till he couldn't work anymore. He had a chance for a watchman's job and bossing jobs, but he never did it. He broke in hundreds of men with him as

partner, over the years.

MM: Did he always work in the same mine?

WEBSTER: No, he worked at the Belmont for many, many years, and he worked at the Anselmo, and he worked at the Black Rock, and he worked at the Elm Orlu and at the Leonard and the Tramway, and the East Colusa and the West Colusa. He worked in an awful lot of mines.

MM: I have heard that a lot of times miners sisn't get to choose which mines they worked in, but the company would assign them to different ones?

WEBSTER: No, it was wherever they rustled, when they went looking for work. They used to rustle for a job.

MM: Tell me about when your stepfather rustled for jobs.

WEBSTER: They'd go to the mine, like at the Belmont, and they'd go to the gate. Then the foreman would hire them, tell them to come out to work, or not to or bypass them. That's how they got hired for the mines.

MM: How long would they contract for? Was that just an indefinite period?

WEBSTER: When they went to work in the mines, they would work on this raise until it was completed, and then they'd put them in another one and another one, or a stope...

MM: So then he would just move around whenever he was finished.

WEBSTER: Yes. But most of the time he was, oh, now he must have worked twenty-five years in the Belmont. He was sure a good man. Just loved him.

MM: How old were you when your mother remarried?

WEBSTER: My dad died in 1919, and my mother remarried in '21. And I was born in '13, so I was six years old. So really he was the

only dad we ever knew.

MM: That's great. What kind of work did your mother do in the boarding houses?

WEBSTER: She was a waitress and a chambermaid.

MM: Did she work in several or in the same one all the time?

WEBSTER: She worked in the same one all the time.

MM: Which one was that?

WEBSTER: In the Mullin House.

MM: I heard that was a real big one.

WEBSTER: Yes, she worked there.

MM: Did she help you get your first job, or how did you go about getting that?

WEBSTER: I got my own first job. We had an employment agency--it was the Bell Employment Agency--and they always had pieces in the paper where they wanted help. So you paid fifty cents or a dollar to this woman from the Bell Employment Agency to get you a job. So I went up there; she got me a job down at the Silver Bow Cafe, washing dishes.

MM: Did you have to lie about your age or anything?

WEBSTER: No, because the man that run the place knew me, and he knew I was just a young kid, but he kept me. But then when the union woman used to come around--Sarah Michaels was the business agent then--he'd duck and say I was the babysitter for his daughter, which I was, too. He was very good to me. Through the rushes, I'd have to stay and wash the dishes and wipe the silver, but they were good. They were Greek people; pretty near all the restaurants were run by Greek people here. They were fabulous people to work for.

MM: Do you remember how much you made for your first paycheck?

WEBSTER: When I first went to work, I made five dollars a week.

MM: For how many hours?

WEBSTER: Well, it just depended on how many hours he'd keep me, sometimes five, sometimes six, sometimes eight. You never had no set time, because right then I didn't belong to the union and I'd be babysitting. Then after I joined the union, why, it was always eight hours. And then we worked seven days a week, and then the union got us six days. Over a period of years they got it down to five days.

MM: How old were you when you joined the union?

WEBSTER: I joined the union in 1929.

MM: How long had you been working before that?

WEBSTER: Maybe about seven months. But I ducked her every time.

MM: How did you finally end up joining? Did they catch you?

WEBSTER: No, he told her that he had a girl working there. But then my girlfriend told me that they wanted a waitress, and would I break in for a waitress at the Union Grill. So I said sure, so I went up there, and got broke in as a waitress. I was there twenty years.

MM: How did you like that work?

WEBSTER: I loved it.

MM: What did you like so much about it?

WEBSTER: The people. The miners respected you. Our miners those days were so respectful. You could go down the street at three o'clock in the morning. For a long time I worked graveyard shift, and I used to walk from my home, where my mother lived, up to the Union Grill on Park Street, and it was about twenty blocks I'd walk up to go to work. You never had to be afraid. Nobody would ever bother you. They'd holler, "How's she going?", "Tough shift," or something like that to you, coming off or going on. You never had to be afraid. Our people were so

respectful to the women those days, and especially to the clergy.

Men of the cloth or women of the cloth, they were so respectful to them all. It's something you don't see nowadays.

MM: I know I get nervous just walking back from my class at ten o'clock. You never know who you're going to run into.

WEBSTER: That's right, you don't have a car.

MM: No. Where did your mother live that this place was a twenty block walk?

WEBSTER: My mother lived down on Warren Avenue, where I was born.

MM: Oh, you were born at home?

WEBSTER: Yes. Well, I was born on Gallatin Street, and then my mother moved down to 518 Warren after, and that's where we lived and that's where mother died. She my / died in the hospital, but that's where she was living, and my dad. That's where they were living when they both died.

MM: Would you tell me what you were telling me the other day about packing the buckets? Say you went into work on a typical day. Would you do that in the morning before you started waiting on people?

WEBSTER: No, honey. When you'd go to work in the morning in a restaurant , the buckets would be put up on the graveyard shift if you went on the morning. They'd be put up, well, then, if they brought in extra buckets. But then on the morning shift, you would have to put up the buckets for the afternoon shift, and all the buckets that came in also in the morning. Because a lot of people didn't leave their buckets in there; they'd bring them in for you to fill or a sack lunch for you to fill. On our shift, we had anywhere between 250 to 450, sometimes 500, buckets a day.

MM: Now if you were working the graveyard shift, those buckets would be for the morning?

WEBSTER: Yes. You see, the miners, when they'd get off shift, they'd come in and have their breakfast, and they'd leave their buckets, and then that would be for the afternoon shift. But the morning shift ones would leave them, and then you'd have to put them up. Each shift would have to put up their own buckets, and we were open twenty-four hours a day. And then the ones we liked, why, we'd always. . . . In the Union Grill where we worked, they used to have great big buckets like great big scrub buckets now. They had a handle, and they were like an old silver bucket or a great big pan with two handles on it. The fruit was always in the icebox. And in the mornings when we'd go in, we'd put a couple of rows of tomatoes or hard-boiled eggs or anything that was special that was in the icebox we'd pile on the bottom, and then we'd put the apples and oranges and bananas on top. And then our favorite boarders, why, we always put the extra stuff on.

MM: Did the people who ran the Union Grill know that you would be putting these extra goodies in the buckets?

WEBSTER: / The bosses? Sure, they knew it. They knew we all were. They didn't care, because they liked the fellows that worked there, and they kept them going all those years. They were good bosses. There were three brothers. There was Frank and Sam and John Veronicus. They were the best bosses that I ever had. Then I worked in Meaderville after that for five years, and I had good bosses then. I've always had good bosses; was very fortunate.

MM: Were the miners paid by the week ?

WEBSTER: First they were paid by the month, and then they got paid bi-monthly every couple of weeks, and then they got paid every week.

MM: When they paid for their buckets, how would that be? Would that

every day?

WEBSTER: No, honey, they'd have meal tickets.

MM: How did that work?

WEBSTER: They had five-dollar meal tickets, ten-, and twenty-dollar meal tickets, and they'd sign up for the meal tickets. Whatever they ate, then you had a punch and you'd punch that out. Of course, a lot of them that we liked, we didn't punch it all out.

MM: [Laughter]

WEBSTER: No use lying, tell the truth.

MM: That's right. [Laughter]

WEBSTER: Then at the end of the week, if their ticket had run out, well, then they'd pay for that, whatever was over, and buy a couple more tickets.

MM: Would most of them also come in for breakfast and dinner? The meals that they didn't eat in the mine, would they come in to your restaurant, too?

WEBSTER: Oh, yes, you'd have them three and four and five times a day. Yes, it was busy; it was busy all the time, but I enjoyed it.

MM: You must have had to work awfully hard.

WEBSTER: I did, but we used to wait to go to work, we used to have so much fun. People used to come in the Union Grill, and us three nuts that were down there... There was a lot of other girls besides Kathleen and Theresa but that was my bunch. Us three stuck together, we went together, we dressed alike.

MM: Did you always work the same shift?

WEBSTER: Most of the time, stagger an hour. One come on at six, one come on at seven, one come on at eight. But then when we'd get through, we'd sit and wait for each other. [Laughter]

MM: So would you go out together after work?

WEBSTER: Yes.

MM: What kinds of things were there to do then?

WEBSTER: There was a lot of dances, and we used to go to the dances. We'd go to the Winter Garden, the Rose Garden, the Sacred Heart, and the Moose, all those places.

MM: Were there good bands here in Butte?

WEBSTER: Yes, there were real good bands. Columbia Gardens. Oh, it was fabulous.

MM: I wish I could have seen that then.

WEBSTER: That was fabulous. The floor was just something else. And the big name bands came in. I can't remember all of them. I remember Jimmy Dorsey was here once. I just can't remember. If I had known before, I could have got a lot more about that stuff.

MM: But it was a good time?

WEBSTER: Good times.

MM: Was it bad here during the Depression?

WEBSTER: Well, it was. A lot of people suffered, but the welfare helped them. And the kids went to CC camps. And those that were working would always help, and the government gave them beans and oatmeal and stuff like that.

MM: Were a lot of the miners laid off?

WEBSTER: Oh, yes. They were working a week on, a week off; two weeks on, two weeks off. But it was great.

MM: You were telling me before what the typical meal in the buckets was.

WEBSTER: Two meat sandwiches. A lot of people didn't like cheese or egg. But they'd have beef, they'd have pork, and they'd have ham. And a lot of times they'd have chicken. Left, you know, they'd cooked

too much ahead. Then we'd sneak a couple of pieces of chicken and put that in the guys' buckets, too.

MM: [Laughter]

WEBSTER: We were great for doing that. They had the two sandwiches and the cake or pie, and fruit, and their coffee. Then they had these compartment buckets, and a lot of the fellows liked tea in it. You'd make the tea and put it in the bottom, and then I don't know what it was at the mines that they but their bucket on if they wanted to keep it warm or get it warm. They'd do that. Then a lot of them just took lemon. We'd cut a couple of lemons up and put them in the bucket, and then they'd make lemonade and put the sugar in. Then they'd fill it with the water themselves. Then the ones that had the thermos buckets had coffee or tea or milk, whatever they wanted.

MM: Did anyone ever bring beer to the mines?

WEBSTER: No, not that I ever knew. Maybe in later years they did, but not in those days, they never did, not that we ever heard of.

MM: Would you usually just pack uniform lunches, or would the miners ask for special things? Did you get to know what they liked and disliked?

WEBSTER: A lot of them didn't like cheese sandwiches, and a lot of them didn't like peanut butter and jelly. Or they didn't like devilled egg or tunafish or stuff like that. You got so you knew what a person liked. You got so, working in the restau-/rants, that you knew what they wanted in the bucket, and you knew what they wanted for breakfast. When we worked at the Grill, there was two rooming houses right across the street down here on Park Street. They're both tore down now. And the Crown/bar was right next to it. And we'd see these fellows coming over. Well, we'd go in the kitchen and order their breakfast, because

they [always] ordered the same thing, ham and eggs or bacon or sausage or hotcakes or two boiled eggs, and we'd go and order. We had a lot of Irish fellows that ate there , and a couple of them that were very mean when they'd get up in the morning. But this one was typical Irish, Mike Holland. He's dead now, God love him. And we'd know if he'd been out the night before, because we could see him coming across through this big bay window, and we'd see him coming across the street. And I'd say to Theresa, "Hurry up, put an Irish record on." We had one of those old phonographs with the horn on, that you'd have to wind it up. And in between waiting on the customers, we'd be winding this up.

MM: [Laughter]

WEBSTER: And we'd go and holler, 'Two boiled eggs for Mike and a boiled potato!" He always wanted a boiled potato for breakfast, even. And they used to have a steamer in the kitchen--we used to call them gunboats, but they call them steamers now--they were just gallon cans. They were galvanized, and they'd put all these potatoes in there, boiled potatoes if they wanted a potato in the morning with their ham and eggs. Some people couldn't eat fried potatoes, well, / they'd eat a boiled potato and then we'd put some butter on it and they could have it that way. Well, we'd do that for him. But we'd always put these Irish records on for this Mike, so when he did open the door he'd hear the Irish music, and then everything was fine. We'd give him his pot of tea and his two boiled eggs and the paper. We always made sure that we had an extra paper for Mike Holland.

MM: [Laughter]

WEBSTER: We really had fun.

MM: There must have been quite a number of characters around here.

WEBSTER: There was. There was a lot of men during the War. All these fellows came in here that couldn't go to the service, and then they came here to work in the mines. A lot of fellows from Michigan and Minnesota and all over. But the ones from Michigan were the great guys. We had more fun with them.

MM: Did they seem to be different?

WEBSTER: They were so funny. We used to pull more jokes on those men than anything We'd ask them, you know, if they'd like this or they'd that to eat, and "Oh, yes." Then we'd tell them to go up to the Finlen and get it, that was when/ the Finlen was across the street. And there was one man, he was the greatest, that Bubby, was. He weighed close to 300 pounds, but he never came in the door that he wasn't happy-go-lucky, and he'd walk back into the kitchen.

So this friend of mine, this Kathleen, she said, "Bubby, come here, I want to ask you something. Do you like bear meat?" Oh, God," he said, "I'd love it. I haven't had any since I left home. "Well," she said, "take a bite of my behind. That's wild meat for you." Well, I thought the man would die. I just thought he would die. That's on the tape.

MM: [Laughter] That's okay.

WEBSTER: I forgot myself.

MM: [Laughter] What did he do, did he run out of the kitchen?

WEBSTER: He would come into the kitchen, and he'd taste this and he'd take that. And one day when he was in there and he went to pick up... I don't know whether it was a piece of carrot or what it was, some kind of a vegetable, or a piece of lettuce. The boss, he just stuck the fork in his hand and he said, "Keep your hands out of the food." Well, it hurt his feelings that he was just/ ready to cry, just like a little kid, because he thought that was his second home, and it was. To the day he died, it was his second home.

MM: Did you have miners that were all from one mine come into the Union Grill or from , one rooming house, or was it a kind of mixture of?

WEBSTER: A mixture. They came from all over. A lot of them had their checks signed over to the cafes.

MM: How would that...?

WEBSTER: From the ACM Company. Their checks would be signed over. Like you come into town and you're broke, and then they'd go into a restaurant, and they'd say, "Well, I'll give you a sign-over on my check until I get payday." And then you'd pick up their first check and take what they owed you out of it. And most of the bosses was good; if the guys were good, they'd only take part of it and let them pay the balance when they got on their feet and got clothes to work with and stuff. It was good.

MM: Was there a lot of coming and going by the miners, or did people generally stay here ?

WEBSTER: They stayed here. For years it was steady, and then after the War and everything then they started drifting. They had the strike and started drifting away. Little by little, they got rid of th boarding houses. That's just the way it happened.

MM: Had most of the miners who came from Michigan worked in the mines in Michigan before?

WEBSTER: Yes.

MM: So they were all experienced.

WEBSTER: Yes, they were a good bunch. There's three or four of them still around here, married.

MM: When you first started working, was it still kind of a town with mostly single men?

WEBSTER: Yes.

MM: Were single women in a minority?

WEBSTER: Oh, yes, very much so. We used to have men waiters, too. In Meaderville, we had men waiters and women waiters both, waitresses. And In the Main Grill we had men, and in the Creamery Cafe and in the Lockwood, and in the Mockson(?) , and the Swamigan(?). Greens. They had men waiters and women. The men waiters were great in those days. Of course, they used to have the girls do pretty near all their work; they were lazy, clean their tables for them and then they'd get the tip and the girl wouldn't get nothing. But, tipping wasn't in those years like it is now. Everybody pretty near tips nowadays. Those years, / maybe somebody'd tip you on payday. Not "maybe"; every miner gave you fifty cents or a dollar on payday, and it was great.

MM: The Women's Protective Union had been around for a long time. Were the/men organized into a union, too?

WEBSTER: The men had the Cooks and Waiters Local that was Local 22. And then they merged / in with our union here about seven years ago. I think Blanche / gave you all that information on that merger.

MM: She said she wasn't in favor of it? How did you feel about it?

WEBSTER: I didn't care. I figured that it was a break for our people ; equal pay for equal work. That's when it started, and I thought it was great, because I think our women were entitled to the same wages. The men were getting almost double the wages our people were.

MM: And before that you hadn't been able to get equal pay.

WEBSTER: No. Our women didn't get much wages. Years ago, ham and eggs was only twenty-five cents. You'd get a half a slice of ham and two eggs and hash-

browned potatoes,and all the coffee you wanted to drink for a quarter. Two boiled eggs was only fifteen cents. And you'd get your toast, jelly. It's been quite a change.

MM: Through all those years/ when just the Women's Union was organized, and you weren't getting the same pay as the men, were the people angry about that?

WEBSTER: No, not until just a few years ago. It was just a few years ago we got into problems with it. And then they had to negotiate a contract;they had to come up with the same pay for the same work.

MM: Before, when you negotiated contracts, / would your local and the Cooks and Waiters local negotiate at different times?

WEBSTER: Yes. Separately.

MM: So it was completely different contracts.

WEBSTER: Yes. For all contracts. Bartenders negotiated theirs, and we negotiated the Culinary. Well, Women's Protective it was all those years.
And then Local 22--that was the Cooks and Waiters Union-- they negotiated theirs.

MM: When you first got started in the union, what kind of role did you play?

WEBSTER: When I first? You mean as an officer of the union?

MM: No, when you started. Did you attend meetings?

WEBSTER: I never missed a meeting. We loved to go to the meetings. We'd have three hundred, four hundred people at a meeting. It was wonderful. It was just a joy to go and hear the business agent, Bridget Shea, and Lena Metosh, the secretary, get up and / tell you what they done, how they'd go around and how our girls was abused by this one and how they'd take it up, and how they'd pick up a broom and chase the boss with the broom.

MM: Really? [Laughter]

WEBSTER: Yes. It was very interesting to hear about them. And we would always go down to Gamer's on the corner of Montana and Park after the meeting, we'd go down there and have ice cream. They used to make their own ice cream. Pretty near always after a meeting, we'd go there or to the Lockwood. That's where they had the best ice cream.

MM: Was there a lot of participation by the ramk and file members in decision-making? Were the meetings very lively?

WEBSTER: Oh, yes. Very lively. They were so interesting that you just hated for them to end.

MM: What kind of things would you discuss?

WEBSTER: You'd discuss all your working conditions, and things that would happen on the job. If you had a grievance or anything, they'd discuss them. You would tell either the president or the secretary, and they would do the talking on the floor and explain all the things to you and what had to be done.

MM: What were some typical grievances and things that people complained about?

WEBSTER: Well, mostly some of the bosses getting smart with the girls. That was quite a for years. And then not paying them right, and working overtime, and no pension.

MM: What kind of things would the people in the union ?

BEGIN TAPE I SIDE II

WEBSTER: She walked all over , , , and all over. We didn't have so many restaurants , like we have now

Most of them was uptown. Then they had Meaderville, and they'd go to Meaderville on Saturday nights. Every Saturday night, you'd expect to see the business agent and the secretary. And then they'd go to see the bartenders in Meaderville.

MM: Why in Meaderville? Was there a lot of problems there?

WEBSTER: No, there was no problems. There was the nightclubs. They'd check them out to see who was working, who wasn't, and who belonged to the union. They were great for bringing in their families to work. The woman would be working there, and she'd bring her daughter with her to help her. And that's why we had such a good union because they were always checked up.

MM: Was there ever any resentment against having to join a union?

WEBSTER: No, not those years there wasn't, not like now. A lot of kids don't want to join now, but never before. They knew they had to. Years ago, you knew you had to join the union if you wanted to work. And that was it. My gosh, your dues was only a dollar a month. Well, it was fifty cents, then it was seventy-five, and then it was a dollar, and automatically it raised over the years until now, when it's six dollars.

MM: Did they have a check-off system or did you have to go...?

WEBSTER: We've never had a check-off system. Never. This is the first year that they've ever had a check-off system, and that's at St. James Hospital.

MM: Who would go and collect the dues?

WEBSTER: The business agent.

MM: So she would get to know everyone in the union then.

WEBSTER: Yes. A lot of them go out to the office and pay. But in those days, they used to always come to the meetings, and they would

pay their dues at the meeting . The secretary and the business agent would be there, and they'd write the receipts and give them to them and stamp their books right at the meeting and then after the meeting. Sometimes they'd be there for an hour and a half after the meeting was over, just collecting dues.

MM: How often would you have meetings?

WEBSTER: Every week.

MM: Really! And you would get three and four hundred people to come to the meetings.

WEBSTER: Yes. Oh, yes. We had close to 1,500 at one time. That's all women.

MM: There must be a difference in meetings now. Do you get as large attendance as you used to?

WEBSTER: No, the younger generation are not interested anymore.

MM: Why do you think that's true?

WEBSTER: Because, I think, they're spoiled by their parents. I really do. We had to get out and work. The kids are handed everything, nowadays,on a silver platter. A lot of them would like you to slide their check under the door for them and say, "You don't have to come to work, but here's your payday." That's just the attitude some of them have. And it's too bad. And then you've got an awful lot of the young generation who are just fabulous workers. But if they're lazy, that's something else, too.

MM: Did you ever have to turn over part of your pay to your parents ?

WEBSTER: I never cashed my own check till I was eighteen years old. I didn't <u>have</u> to, but I always gave my mother my check. Well, we never were paid in checks; we were paid in cash, put in an envelope. And

we never had the taxes those years when I was young. My mother would get my pay, and she'd buy my clothes and that.

MM: Did she give you a certain amount for your own?

WEBSTER: I could always get anything I wanted from her. If I couldn't get it from her, my stepdad would give it to me. He'd give me anything in the world, he was so good.

MM: When the union merged and you all of a sudden had a mixed union, did you notice a difference in the spirit of the union, from having an all women's union to having a men's and women's?

WEBSTER: We never had too many men ever come to the meetings. We did for a while--when they first merged, we had a few of them--but they were just kind of agitators in the union and that was it. Not too many.

MM: Apart from the problem of bosses who were harrassing the waitresses, were there ever any other problems that you felt were unique to women that your union handled that might not have been taken care of in a mixed union?

WEBSTER: No, I don't think so. Anything that was wrong, we always tried to take care of it. I was recording secretary of the union first. I was on the executive board for the union. That was before Blanche(Copenver) ever came to Butte.

MM: When were you first an officer?

WEBSTER: I was first an officer in 1936.

MM: That was as recording secretary?

WEBSTER: Yes.

MM: Was that an elected or an appointed office?

WEBSTER: It was an appointed. But I enjoyed it. And then I was business agent for sixteen and a half years.

MM: So you must have known everybody in town, practically.

WEBSTER: Well, I know a lot of them.

MM:Were any of the union officers ever paid officers?

WEBSTER: We were paid officers. You'd get a weekly salary when you're a business agent and secretary. President and recording secretary are monthly salary. Years ago, you used to only get five dollars for a meeting, but now they get $137 or $140 a month. But the business agent used to only get $35 a week.

MM: How much time would you put in doing that work?

WEBSTER: When you were business agent?

MM: Yes.

WEBSTER: In all the years that I was, I could truthfully say I never put in less than sixty to sixty-five hours.

MM: And that was on top of your own job, or were you just working as the business agent then?

WEBSTER: Just when I was business agent. That was the only job. When you're business agent, you can't do any other. You can when you're president or recording secretary. But /Secretary and business agent is one job.

MM: When did you become business agent, after you had stopped working at the Union Grill?

WEBSTER: No, I was a janitress at the Metals Bank Building when I took that job. I was working there, and they came after me and asked me if I wouldn't be the business agent for the union. And I thought about it and thought about it, and I thought, "Oh, I don't know," and then I took it and I enjoyed it. I enjoyed every minute of it. And then my legs got bad, and I couldn't work no more. I just got exhausted. I was sixty-five years old, and I thought it was time for somebody else to take over.

MM: Why did it take you so long to decide? Did you have misgivings about taking on the job in the beginning?

WEBSTER: I didn't think that I could do it. I had worked around the restaurants and I knew a lot of people and been there all my life, and I thought, "Oh, I don't know whether I can do it or not." And they said, "Well, you can do it Val, so take it, and we'll help you. And I got a lot of good advice from different union people around. I was very active with the Plumbers and the Carpenters and the General Laborers and Operating Engineers. So if there was any problems in the restaurants like with the contract, something that they were doing against it, if they didn't want to put up the house card , or I'd have problems and I couldn't solve them, I'd get two or three of these guys to go with me, and we'd sit down and we'd talk to the boss. I never took the matter to the union. I'd try to adjust it on the outside myself, which I did.I could truthfullysay we never had a strike in all the years that I was business agent.

MM: Were there particularly notorious bosses that you would have repeatedly to go and try to correct things with?

WEBSTER: No. Our hardest problems was with these chain outfits when they came in. But still I can't say we had too much trouble with them, because we had the Ramada and the War Bonnet. As soon as we talked to them and they agreed that they'd live up to the rules, why, that was it. Like Fairmont Hot Springs. I went down and talked to them people. As soon as they started building a place or somebody else was going to take over, I would go see them. But I wouldn't go alone; I'd always take some of these men from these other unions with me, and we'd just discuss everything that was going on. And tell them that it was a union town, and if they wanted to have to have union help, then they'd have to live

up to union rules. And it wasn't belligerant/or nothing about it. I mean we sat down, enjoyed a cup of coffee together, and talked it over, and I never ha any problems. The Fairmont was a very big deal for us, because part of it was in Anaconda and part of it was here. But the main part of it was in Silver Bow County, so we had the jurisdiction over it. So it was really a feather in my hat to get it. We got that, and now they've got Wendy's and all these places lined up. We had the Ramada and the War Bonnet, and we had the Kentucky Fried Chicken, the El Taco, and John's Taco, and the Village Inn. None of those places were union all over the state. So we were very fortunate that we were able to get them.

MM: And they didn't put up much of an opposition?

WEBSTER: No, because they knew that they had to belong to the union. (Sullivan) Clela/done a tremendous job getting Wendy's in. She had talked to the gentlemen down there, and they came up. And the Black Angus; of course, that's part of the 4B's.

MM: Oh, I didn't realize that.

WEBSTER: The Haimleins(?) have been wonderful people, and Jim Dempsey (?) and George Spencer, they've ween wonderful people to deal with. So when you have people like that, you don't have to worry.

MM: You weren't business agent in 1946 when there was that strike.

WEBSTER: No.

MM: Do you remember that strike?

WEBSTER: I wasn't here when that strike was on.

MM: Oh, where were you then?

WEBSTER: I was in Idaho.

MM: So you haven't always been . . .

WEBSTER: Oh, I came back and forth. I was in Wallace, Idaho, when

that strike was on. I came back and forth and came to their meetings and tried to help, but I went to Idaho to live. I was in Idaho for about a year.

MM: Was it during that strike that the women turned over the laundry trucks?

WEBSTER: No, that was during the miners' strike.

MM: Was that in '58?

WEBSTER: That was in '46.

MM: Oh, the '46 strike. Yes, I've heard that was a real bitter strike.

WEBSTER: Yes, it was a bitter strike. But you should get that information from a miner. It would be so much better .

MM: Yes, I'm going to try to interview them. So all the unions stuck together in those .

WEBSTER: Oh, definitely. They sure did stick together. Carl Rowan that runs Gamer's was one of our worst people when the strike was on.

MM: Why?

WEBSTER: He used to take the laundry to Helena to do the laundry.

MM: Was this kind of a general strike? Why was the laundry a problem?

WEBSTER: They used to take the laundry over there because the laundry workers wouldn't do it here. They didn't do anything that was against our union. The rest of the state was not unionized like Butte was, and they'd take the cleaning and the laundry and all that stuff from all these different places. The bosses all ganged together, and they were trying to do it. Well, they found out they couldn't do it.

MM: Had the laundry workers gone out on strike in support of the miners as a whole?

WEBSTER: No, that was our strike, honey, when all that stuff happened. That was the Culinary Union strike. That was on account of wages. But, see, I wasn't here, so I'm not going to tell you anything about it, because I don't want to be misquoted on saying, "I've heard. . . . " I just don't want to do that.

MM: When the miners were on strike in the fifties , Blanche was telling me a committee was out collecting money from all over the state. What kind of support would all the unions show together?

WEBSTER: They all gave everything that they could give. And they had coffee and donuts and sandwiches and stuff, and everybody brought canned stuff from their homes or flour or sugar or coffee or tea or anything they could bring up to the offices, and baskets were made up and they were delivered to the most needy people.

MM: So it's made quite a difference being a union town. you went to Idaho for the year, did you work down there?

WEBSTER: I worked for about two months in a cafe down there, and I was elected president of the union down there in Wallace, Idaho. But I only stayed there for a little over a month as president; there was just too much bickering. I just couldn't do it.

MM: Blanche told me about the period of time when the union was taken into trusteeship by the International because of internal bickering. Was that a painful time for the union?

WEBSTER: It was; it was a sad time for the union. Because the secretary and the business agent that we had--Lena Metosh / was secretary, and Bridget Shea--and there never were two finer union people. But we had a couple of cats in the union that carried tales to one and carried tales to the other and caused

friction between the two of them. And they were like two sisters for forty years up in that union. / It was really a sad thing. And then they took it under trusteeship and Blanche / was appointed president. No, recording secretary, and then later she became president. It's just something that I don't want to talk about, honey. / It's painful to me, because they were two of the greatest union women that ever lived.

MM: Are they both dead now?

WEBSEER: Oh, yes. Both dead. And the ones that caused the trouble, neither one of them could ever hold a candle to them, because they were dedicated union people.

MM: It sounds like there were some real strong union women in this town.

WEBSTER: There were. We loved to go to the union. We never missed a meeting.

MM: It seems to have meant more than just better wages and working conditions.

WEBSTER: It was friendship. Everybody was your friend. You'd go, and you'd have the best time and talk things and laugh and tell jokes It was just wonderful. It held up for quite a few years good, and now the unions are going down. Everybody knows that. But it held up for many years. But we never had a union like we had when / Bridget and Lena. No disrespect to any of the other officers, because I was an officer myself. But I was very, very hurt over that.

MM: Do you mark that as a time when the union started to change?

WEBSTER: Yes, I sure do. It sure did start to change, because people were so hurt over the lies and the accusations and stuff that it was terrible. Don't believe in them lies, it hurts. We've

got a real good secretary in our union now. I'll truthfully say that. She's a wonderful, hard-working woman, and she's dedicated She's union! Her heart and soul is in union. And her son was the first one that started the Policemen's Union.

MM: What was her name again?

WEBSTER: Sullivan. Her son Nicky is a police officer. And he started the union. He was president of the Policemen's Union. But the whole family of the Sullivans are dedicated union people. That's why I say I've always been hurt over what happened to Bridget and Lena. Never forget them.

MM: Do you think that a lot of people feel as strongly about the idea of union as you do?

WEBSTER: I think there's a lot of them do, especially our older people, and then there's a lot of the younger ones do, too, now. I think when they ask you questions about the union and "What's this?" and "What's that?", the wage scale and how many hours and what they're supposed to do, when they ask you those kinds of questions, you know they're interested in the union, and they want to do what's right. And I think those are the kind of people who should be trained for the jobs.

MM: Has your union ever set up any kind of . . .

WEBSTER: Training program? No. The only training program they ever had was when Fairmont opened, and they didn't do that; that came through the job service. Mary McHeller(?)-she was a waitress at the Finlen --was the teacher. She taught the waitresses how to set up the tables and to wait on the customers. Pretty near every one of those girls that was at Fairmont stayed until just lately.

MM: So there was never any kind of apprenticeship program in their union.

WEBSTER: No, not in ours. But like if you'd come to work in the place and I'd been there a while, I'd show you what to do, and I'd take the heavy load until you learned the ropes. Maybe you'd have half a counter, and I'd have half a counter. Well, maybe I'd take three-fourths of the counter until you got broke in. And then I'd give you the place closest to the kitchen so you wouldn't have so far to go. That's the way we worked it years ago.

MM: Were people pretty good about--I know Blanche was outlining all the categories like kitchen helper and yard girl --staying within their boundaries?

WEBSTER: Oh, yes. Years ago, they never stepped out of the boundaries. But, you see, now it's different. Entirely different.

MM: Do you think that the jobs have changed so much?

WEBSTER: Yes, I do. I think that they have gave them more leeway. We used to stick to the one thing, whatever. If you was a pantry girl, you was a pantry girl. That was who made the salads and sandwiches

If you was a dishwasher, you was a dishwasher. I can't say that I didn't help dishwashers. A lot of times even when I was a waitress. Wasn't supposed to, and keep our eye out for Bridget to come in, but I loved her. One time I was working at the Union Grill and this Austrianwoman, she was a real heavy woman, and she was working there. Oh, my gosh, she was a good worker. And it was suppertime. I was cooking then. I wasn't doing the waitress work then; I was a cook then. There was four waitresses and one dishwasher and myself. I was the cook for the four waitresses. And it was time for her to eat. And she said, "Oh, no, I've got to get those dishes out." So I said, "Never mind the dishes. Sit down and eat." I had cooked her some pork chops and some potatoes and stuff and fixed peas. I can still see that dish

sitting in front of her to this day. And I went over, and it

was quiet. Everybody was waited on in front, and I said, "Mary, I'll wash your dishes up for you." "Oh, no," she said, "Bridget comes in and catches you." "Oh," I said, "Bridget won't be in at this time of night." It was just about seven o'clock, and I never thought she'd come in, because she used to come in around eight or nine o'clock at night, when she'd come in to catch the both shifts. And I said, "Oh, she won't be in." Here I am, and I've got my head in the sink, and I'm going as fast as I can washing these dishes.

MM: Oops. [Laughter]

WEBSTER: The girls in the front were petrified when they saw her, because we were scared of her.

MM: Was she much older than you at this time?

WEBSTER: Oh, yes, I was just a young girl. I went like that, and I said,"Oh, Bridget."What are you doing?" I said, "Well, Mary's eating, and her dishes are piled up, and I thought I'd help her." "Oh, that's very nice," she said. "What time do you get off shift tomorrow?" I said, "I don't come to work till twelve o'clock." She said, "Come up to the union office at eleven o'clock tomorrow. I'll be there." Well, I knew I was in for it. So I went up. I never slept all that night. My mother said, "That's what you get. If you stayed and done your own work, you wouldn't have got into trouble." I never knew that Bridget had called my mother and told my mother not to worry, that she wouldn't punish me that much. So I went up at eleven o'clock to Bridget, and I said to her, "You told me to come up?" "And just what were you doing washing dishes?" I said, "I told you, poor Mary, and Mary was sick. And I just thought I'd give her a hand." She said, "You know you're a cook. You're not a dishwasher. The first thing you know, them Greeks will have you washing dishes and. . . ." And I said, "Oh, no, they won't,

because I won't do it." "Well," she said, "you done it today." And I said, "Well, that was just to help her a little bit." "Well," she said, "I'll let you go this time, and I won't bring you before the Executive Board, but if I ever catch you again it'll be too bad." But you know, years after,her and Lena had the best laugh over it. They knew they had scared me to death.

MM: [Laughter]

WEBSTER: But I helped the woman after, too, because she was the kindest woman, and I did help her. And I knew it was wrong, and still I thought if it was my mother washing dishes, I'd help her. So I felt that I was helping my fellow man, and I still feel that way today. And especially where there are old women washing dishes. I do. I never caught one helping anybody, but I don't think I could ever punish them or bring them before the Executive Board or anything for doing it, for the simple reason that I had done it myself.

MM: It doesn't seem that union rules should stand in the way of letting you help your fellow worker.

WEBSTER: Oh, yes, but if they didn't, honey, they'd be doing everything. You'd be scrubbing the floor and washing the dishes and washing glasses and silver and waiting on customers and cleaning out the toilet and everything else, and peeling spuds and. . . . No, if if they didn't segregate your work, you'd be up against it.

MM: Had your mother belonged to the union?

WEBSTER: My mother belonged.

MM: She must have joined it very early.

WEBSTER: She joined it when she first came here. They all had to join right now.

MM: So it affiliated with the International in 1907, but it had

been started by the . . .

WEBSTER: Western . . .

MM: Federation of Miners earlier.

WEBSTER: Yes.

MM: So she must have joined the original Women's Protective Union.

WEBSTER: Yes, and both of my aunts.

MM: So you were really from a union family.

WEBSTER: Oh, yes, my family was all union.

MM: Then your father and stepfather must have been in the Miners Union.

WEBSTER: Oh, yes, I'm union all the way through.

MM: Well, that's great. I think I'm out of questions for right now.

WEBSTER: Okay, dear. And if you think of something some other time, come up. If you want some other information, feel free to come.

[End of interview]