

## Couple recalls a more 'rural' side of Superior

He was a copper miner with a yen for ranching. She was a waitress who sometimes daydreamed about living somewhere more, well, cosmopolitan.

She hadn't meant to stay in Superior, and certainly didn't intend to marry a miner. But when young, pretty Jean caught the eye of one Alex "Red" Arnett, it wasn't long before he was showing up regularly in the café where she worked, clean-shaven and spiffed up, with his signature mop of red hair all slicked down. Soon he was walking her home after her shift, sitting with Jean on her family's porch until her grandmother shooed him away.

November marked the 52nd wedding anniversary for Red and Jean, who between them have seen the town go from having wild burros roaming the streets and irregular electrical service, to a booming mining town, a town that is ready for economic revitalization.

Unlike most of the men who worked for the mines in the early 1950s, Red didn't have a strong interest in becoming a miner. Ever since he was a little boy, he'd dreamed of becoming a bona fide cowboy. Southeastern Arizona's other major industry at that time was cattle ranching.

When Red came back from his tour of duty with the U.S. Marine Corps, he tried desperately to get a job with a ranch, holding out as long as he could, selling off possessions for cash to live, until there was nothing left to do but walk into the Magma mine business office and ask for a job.

While he did get a job as a laborer, he never gave up his dream of being a cowboy, and at one point began working at a ranch in Florence Junction on his days off, helping to drive wild horses.

At one point, Red had the opportunity to participate in a full-fledged cattle drive for the Clemens Cattle Co., and since he had some vacation time saved, he asked for the time off. The mine officials gave Red the time off, albeit reluctantly, cautioning him that he would have to decide once and for all if he was going to be a miner or a cowboy.

Ultimately, fate stepped in and made that decision for him.

While attempting to round up some yearlings, Red's horse stumbled and fell, temporarily pinning him beneath. His leg broken, he had to be taken down the mountain to the nearest school bus stop so the bus could bring him into town and eventually to the hospital. With a cast up to his thigh, Red wasn't able to be much of a rancher or a miner.

Hard times fell on Red, including being let go from the mine. He spent some time as caretaker for a local ranch, whose crew was out on a roundup. But when that roundup was finished, so was his job. He tried to go back to the mine, but they still remembered his name ... and the answer was still no.

Finally one of the hiring bosses softened toward him and called Red with a job opportunity. It had less prestige than working underground, but that suited Red just fine. "I never did like to be confined," he explains.

Red says he learned his lesson. "I stayed there, I didn't try to go and play cowboy. I would still help out at my friend's father's ranch on the weekends, but it didn't get in the way of my Magma job. I didn't have any more trouble with the mine after that."

All of his jobs with the Magma mine were aboveground. He started as a laborer, pushing 12-by-12 timbers that came in off the railroad cars in to the mine's framing shed. After that, he was promoted to a helper, helping the man inside the framing shed put the timbers in the lathing machine. Then a job driving a truck to deliver ice to the smelter and the mine pits came up. The job started at 3:30 a.m., delivering the large blocks of ice to the coolers so that miners could chip off chunks and add them to their water pouches (in the days before metal canteens) prior going on shift at 7:30 a.m.

"I bid for it, but they didn't want to give it to me," Red says. "The union helped by pointing out I had seniority. The union really did help the miners."

But not even the union could do much to help when it was discovered that Red had a serious physical problem. One day while at work, Red said he "felt a little funny." The next thing he knew, he woke up in the hospital.

Though he doesn't talk about the specifics of his condition, the results of it are periodic seizures. Whether caused by an earlier accident (he fell off a horse during a town parade and hit his head), or some previously undiagnosed medical condition, the end result was the same.

Early retirement.

After 30 years with Magma, Red said goodbye in 1974. "They had a big party for me up at the Magma Club," he recalls. "Everybody in the company gave me a party and money and everything."

He did some work for the city for a time, and other odd jobs. When their youngest daughter (one of four children, two boys and two girls) got accepted to Northern Arizona University, Jean and Red moved there also to be supportive. "It was different, working up in the cool weather," he says. "We eventually came back to Superior, and we've been here ever since."

It's hard to escape their memories of and their ties to the town. Jean remembers her mother sending her to the store to buy lunchmeat to make her father a sandwich during his lunch hour. She also recalls getting in trouble when she didn't quite make it home in time, being distracted by the area "wildlife"—whether wild burros roaming the street, or interesting bugs crawling along the dirt, or the occasional cows that would wander into town.

Superior was a fun town for a child, Jean says. "If burros were in your yard, they were yours for the day. We'd get on them and ride around, or they'd dump you or refuse to walk. The adults would chase them out of their yards, sometimes even out of the drug store or other local shops. They'd only move off the street when they were good and ready."

Even the cows got into the act, eating plants in people's yards, napping in alleyways, and knocking over garbage cans looking for a snack.

As the town modernized, so did the entertainment. At least, it did for the adults.

Red's dad, Alex Arnett Sr., ran the local pool hall, located where Lola's Café now sits. Red has a sneaking suspicion that his dad was selling bootleg hooch as well, but he was too young to know for sure, and no one in the family ever 'fessed up. If pool wasn't your game of choice, an illegal card game usually could be found in the back room of one of the many local watering holes.

The couple hopes to see the vitality of the town—minus the illegal activity—return some day. Horses have given way to ATVs, and much of the town's rural nature has disappeared. But there is still enough of the small-town atmosphere left to make it an attractive place to raise a family and put down deep roots, just like the Arnett's did, says Red and Jean.