

A look back at life in Superior—from a woman's perspective

When most Arizonans think about the town of Superior, they think about mining. But when Superior native Polly Drakovich thinks about her home town, she recalls summers swimming in the pool behind the Magma Club, “quiet time” in the afternoons when the children rested and the mothers talked quietly with each other in the front yard, and trips into Phoenix that were an occasion to dress in your Sunday finest.

Drakovich, born Hildred Essie Corn in 1924 to parents Jasper and Minnie of Superior, paints a much different picture than most see when confronting the image of this small mining town nestled at the foot of the historic Apache Leap Mountain.

The men can spin yarns about the dangers and rewards of mining, the bonds of friendship and trust that are formed 3,000 feet underground, the struggle to earn enough money to raise a family and give their children better opportunities than they had.

But few hear the tales of the girls born in town who typically became the wives of the next generation of miners. Life in Superior, from a woman's perspective, often was a much different yarn.

When Polly was 6 weeks old, the Corn's moved into a home, on what is now called Copper Street, which was owned by Magma Copper Mining Co. Jasper was a supervisor for the mine, a rank high enough to garner him a new home built for him and his family by the company.

“We lived in that house until I was about 12 or so, and then we moved across the street to the east into another house with an extra room, because there were six children by then,” Drakovich says. By this time she had five brothers to share space with, so the mining company built the first three-bedroom house in the neighborhood—and that extra bedroom was just for Polly.

“We had bathrooms with running water and flush toilets with a septic tank at the end of the street, whereas most houses in town didn't have that,” she recalls.

The next house the family moved to was for a much sadder reason. Drakovich's father became ill with what was commonly referred to as miner's consumption, and the family moved into a home owned by the mine that was much closer to the hospital. He was the first of the family—but unfortunately, not the last—to be killed as a direct result of his association with mining.

After his death, the family grew closer together, with everyone pitching in around the house to help.

“All the boys lived at home and made a lot of work for mom, what with the washing, ironing, and making lunches every day for them to take to the mine,” Drakovich says. “We helped where we could, cleaning the house and doing dishes. I think it was a hard life for her, looking back.”

When the children were younger, they had to make their own entertainment. There were no arcades, no roller rinks, and for many years there was no library. Drakovich, an avid reader, nearly wore out the few books that they had in the home, reading and re-reading them over the years.

She was a good student, and recalls one time when her grades earned her a reward that turned her brothers green with envy.

“When I was in the first grade, I took my report card home, and on the way a man stopped me and asked to see my report card,” she explains. “He looked it over and put a check mark on it, and then gave it back. I later received a whole case of Coca Cola for getting all As. It turns out it was some sort of promotion by the Coca Cola company that year. My brothers really looked differently at me after that,” she laughs.

After school, children went home and more or less stayed in their own neighborhood for the rest of the day. “You weren’t allowed to wander around town,” Drakovich says. “Most of my friends were the children of other supervisors who lived in our neighborhood.”

Summers were spent frolicking in the Magma Club pool, but only on Mondays and Tuesdays. The swimming pool closed in 1941 after one of Drakovich’s brothers fell off the diving board and broke his collarbone. Following in the tradition of the Mexican *siesta*, after the children ate their lunches it was “quiet time.”

“Kids weren’t allowed outside for a couple of hours,” Drakovich explains. “It was too hot to be outside anyway. You’d have a fan in your house, but no central air or swamp coolers.” Even today, she says, most of the homes don’t have central air, and rely on swamp coolers to make the house more comfortable during the scorching summer months.

Occasionally there were trips into “town”—in this case, the burgeoning metropolis of Phoenix—that became something of an event in itself.

“When you went shopping in Phoenix, even from Superior, everybody dressed up,” Drakovich says. “The ladies would wear dresses and high heels. Everybody went on the bus. There was a Lerner’s Goldwater’s, a Switzer’s, and a drug store, a place where you could eat, all within two blocks of the bus station. It was an all-day event.”

Since the Corn’s were one of the few Superior families with a car, many summers saw them loading it up for trips to Long Beach, Calif., or to visit relatives in Idaho. It may have given the Corn children a more cosmopolitan outlook, and perhaps an itch to one day leave their tiny home town.

Though Drakovich moved away from Superior after graduating high school in 1942, and spent many years living in other Arizona communities, fate—or perhaps her heart—eventually led her back to the town of her birth. Her husband, not unexpectedly, worked in the mining industry, in this case at the smelter.

Drakovich herself was not unfamiliar with the industry, having worked as a switchboard operator and secretary to the auditor for Magma, and as a secretary for Kennecott Copper Co. in the industrial relations department, and later as administrative assistant to the Quality Control director.

All five of her brothers, at some point in their lives, worked for the Magma mine. One of her brothers was killed in a mining accident in Salt Lake City, Utah, when he was only 28 years old.

Comment [m1]: This needs to be checked...

The Drakovich's had only daughters; Renee was born in 1944, and Stephanie in 1947. Both went to high school in Superior, and each went on to receive a college education—Renee at Northern Arizona University, and Stephanie at Arizona State University.

Drakovich says Superior was a good place to raise a family. “We used to be able to go off and leave our doors unlocked; we might not even have a key,” she recalls.

Drakovich, who now sells real estate in Superior, sees more eyes from the Valley area turning toward Superior as a place to retire or have a summer home. Some are even using Superior as a “bedroom” community for commuting to Tucson or even Mesa.

More families can bring renewed vigor not only to the town's economy, but also to its sense of pride, Drakovich says. She looks to parent involvement in schools, and civic involvement in the community, to help solve many of the problems in town; returning it to the safe, happy and close-knit place of Hildred “Polly” Corn's childhood.