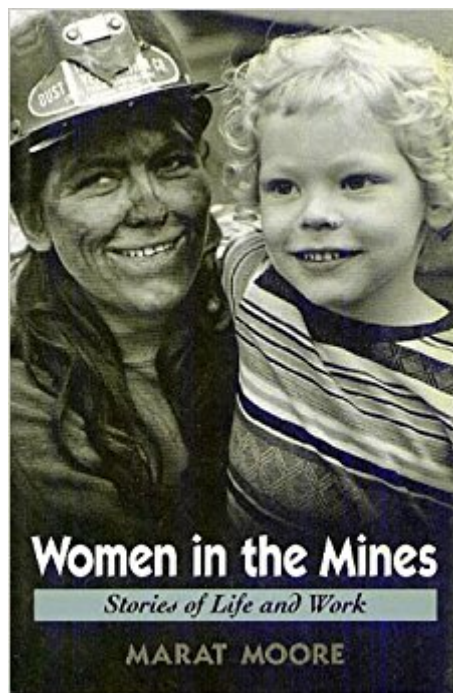




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Women In The Mines: Stories Of Life And Work (Twayne's Oral History Series)



Synopsis

Excerpt from the Preface: In this book, women coal miners describe their working lives in a hazardous industry that remained virtually all-male until 1973. Women miners fought the odds for a measure of economic freedom with a determination and blood-and-guts courage normally attributed to men. They built a women's support network and made their voices heard in the United Mine Workers of American (UMWA). Their story is part of the larger history of social upheaval created by the broad entry of women into the workforce of the United States in the last several decades. These narratives reflect the impact of shifting sex roles on the coal mine workplace and on domestic life. Like the tradition of diaries and journal-keeping, the oral history of women can be intensely personal, illuminating the truth beneath a bloodless chronology of events.

Book Information

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personal, illuminating the truth beneath a bloodless chronology of events.

I first discovered this book while doing research at my local library for a personal writing project, and I was pleasantly surprised. I had expected a statistics-laced academic treatise of some sort, I guess. Instead, I found more than 300 pages of first-person accounts of life in and around the nation's coal mines, each told by a unique voice coming from a riveting personal experience. While not everyone will be drawn to every story, I can practically guarantee that if you have any interest in the subject, at least in the years 1914-1994, you'll find something in 'Women in Mines: Stories of Life and Work.' The women here come from a wide range of different regions and a broad spectrum of socio-economic backgrounds. Some are married to miners, others are single moms. Gay and straight. White, African-American, and Navajo. Many are from the coal-rich states in the Appalachian coal fields, but the Deep South (Alabama, for instance) and the western states are represented, as well. There is insight into the world underground -- including the inherent dangers of the industry, sexual harassment, and the difficult daily tasks of mining -- as well as community attitudes and personal crises (pregnancy, divorce, etc.). Sadly, we even meet one woman who would eventually die in a work-related accident. But the women here are not complaining. These are proud women who've been through tough times and come out with some amazing stories to tell about an industry that many people tend to ignore or take for granted. I was especially delighted to see that author Marat Moore had been a miner in the same county I hail from, It left me wondering if she knew any of my relatives who worked in the mines there. No matter, I tip my hat to her. And I thank her for a wonderfully insightful book.

I just finished reading Marat Moore's book "Women in the Mines," in which 24 women share their experiences while working as coal miners. Moore, who worked in the mines herself, is a skilled interviewer who has written these women's stories with compassion and great respect. Some of these women wanted to work in the mines. Others did it because they needed to support families, and the mines paid a good living wage and provided their families with health insurance. These courageous women held their ground in spite of groundless superstition, intimidation by the men, scorn by wives (who resented their husbands working along side women underground), physical dangers, and sexual harassment. Unfortunately, these good jobs did not last long. Coal fell out of favor as environmental concerns forced the public to seek cleaner ways to provide warmth and energy. In the words of coal miner Bonnie Boyer, "We were pioneers, and 20 years later we're dinosaurs."

The woman on the front page of the book is my mother Nancy Bowen and my older brother Randall Bowen.

The womens stories in this book show how one can rise above any circumstances. I is an inspiration to the strength of women, men, and families.

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