

“The Legacy”

Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level: 8.35

Flesch Reading Ease Score: 66.44

Legal experts differ on the importance of the Eveleth Mines case. When it was decided, some lawyers thought it would lead to a flood of similar lawsuits – big, class-action cases in which all the women in a company sued as a group.

The predicted flood has not materialized, but the case was followed by other class action sexual harassment cases that resulted in large damage awards. Mitsubishi settled a case for \$34 million after women alleged they'd been groped and faced lewd comments and obscene graffiti at an Illinois auto plant. Dial Soap settled a similar case for \$10 million.

In recent years there've been class action harassment suits against Merrill Lynch, the federal mint in Denver, mental hospitals in Nebraska, and the dockworkers union in Florida. Teen workers filed a class action harassment suit against fast food restaurants in Arizona and New Mexico.

Law professor Melissa Hart says the EEOC has made a conscious decision to pursue discrimination and harassment cases as class actions, but she says the courts aren't seeing a deluge of class action harassment cases. Hart believes that's partly because the kind of company-wide harassment that happened at Eveleth Mines is less common these days. So it usually doesn't work to sue as a group. “I think there's been a sort of a settling down to a place where most of the time, most employees live without sexual harassment,” Hart says. “At the same time, it's still out there, and still out there so much more regularly than you wish it would be. But I definitely think things are wildly better than they were 30 years ago in 1975 when Lois Jensen started working at Eveleth Mines.”

Today, the mine in Eveleth has the anti-harassment policy the women fought for. Denise Vesel says if someone harassed her today, she could report it, and management would make it stop. The mine has new owners now. Vesel says the graffiti is painted over, and she hasn't felt she had to slug any of the men recently.

“The guys themselves have all more or less cooled their jets,” she says. “They don't harass anymore. There are a few with big mouths, but ... it isn't like it used to be in the 70s and 80s. It was terrible back then. I mean, all the ones that were causing trouble are either dead, retired, or quit. So we don't have that breed out there anymore.”

Vesel says workers at the mine, men and women, feel like they have to stick together these days, because there are so few of them left. Changes in the steel industry have led to steep drops in employment. The workforce in the mines is less than a third of what it was in 1979, down from more than 13,000 people to fewer than 4,000. There are fewer workers, and fewer of them are women; women got laid off first because they had the least seniority. But women are still there.