

= The Fabulous Moolah =

Mary Lillian Ellison ( July 22 , 1923 ? November 2 , 2007 ) was an American professional wrestler , better known by her ring name The Fabulous Moolah . She began her career working with promoter Billy Wolfe and his wife , wrestler and trainer Mildred Burke , as well as working alongside professional wrestler " Nature Boy " Buddy Rogers . She won the NWA World Women 's Championship in 1956 and was the most prominent holder of the title for approximately the next 30 years .

In the 1980s , she joined the World Wrestling Federation ( WWF , later WWE ) as part of the Rock ' n ' Wrestling Connection storyline , feuding with Cyndi Lauper and Wendi Richter , the latter of whom defeated her for the WWF Women 's Championship in 1984 . Ellison was marketed by the WWF as holding the record for the longest title reign by any athlete in any professional sport . According to WWE , she was also the first WWF Women 's Champion and held the title a total of four times .

In addition , Ellison was a prominent trainer and promoter in women 's professional wrestling . In the 1990s , she returned to the WWF in a comedic role with longtime friend Mae Young . Ellison became the first woman to be inducted into the WWE Hall of Fame in 1995 and became the oldest champion in the history of professional wrestling when she won the WWF Women 's Championship at age 76 , in 1999 . In 2010 , WWE recognized her as the 27th best wrestler ever .

= = Early life = =

Mary Lillian Ellison was born in 1923 in Kershaw County , South Carolina , and grew up in Tookedoo , 12 miles from Columbia . The youngest of five children , Ellison was the only daughter of a part Cherokee father and an Irish mother . Her parents owned a farm , a grocery store , and a service station .

When her mother died of cancer , eight @-@ year @-@ old Ellison went to live with her paternal grandmother and worked on her cousin 's cotton farm to make money . At age 10 , Ellison was still deeply distraught over her mother 's death ; to cheer her up , her father took her to the local wrestling matches . Ellison liked the matches , but it was not until she saw Women 's Champion Mildred Burke wrestle that " they began to mean much more to me . "

Ellison returned to the Columbia home of her father and brothers . She graduated Columbia High School , but at age 14 married 21 @-@ year @-@ old Walter Carroll . They soon became parents to a daughter . A few months after the birth of her daughter , she divorced Carroll . Still only 15 , she left her daughter with a friend and set out on a wrestling career of her own .

= = Professional wrestling career = =

= = = Early career ( 1940s ? 1950s ) = = =

Ellison began her wrestling career with Mildred Burke 's husband Billy Wolfe , the dominant women 's promoter of the time . Her first match was on May 26 , 1949 against June Byers at the Boston Arena . Wolfe was notorious for advising his wrestlers to enter into sexual relationships with either himself or competing promoters to ensure additional bookings , a practice with which Ellison refused to go along . She , however , soon began a romance with wrestler Johnny Long . Long later introduced Ellison to Jack Pfefer who gave her the moniker " Slave Girl Moolah " . By the early 1950s , Moolah was a valet for " Nature Boy " Buddy Rogers , accompanying him to the ring while providing eye candy for the male audiences and assisting Rogers against his opponents . Ellison broke up the partnership because Rogers kept pushing her to begin a sexual relationship . She then served as the valet for the Elephant Boy ( Tony Olivas ) . Olivas was Mexican , but had very dark skin , which caused controversy when Ellison , a white woman , would kiss him on the cheek during their ring entrance routine . At one show in Oklahoma City , a man , who thought that Olivas was a

black man , attempted to stab Ellison with a knife for kissing him . Moolah later left Pfeffer 's promotion and began wrestling under Boston promoters Tony Santos and Paul Bowser . In 1955 , she began working for Vince McMahon , Sr. ' s Capitol Wrestling Corporation .

= = = World Champion ( 1956 ? 1970s ) = = =

On September 18 , 1956 , Moolah defeated Judy Grable in a 13 @-@ woman battle royal to win the vacant World Women 's Championship , which shares a lineage with the NWA World Women 's Championship . She was not immediately recognized by everyone as the NWA Champion because Billy Wolfe , with whom she had had conflict earlier in her career , still controlled the promotion . After the match , Vince McMahon , Sr. dubbed Ellison with a new ring name ? The Fabulous Moolah . Subsequently , June Byers came out of retirement to challenge Moolah to a match for the title . During the match , Moolah acted as the aggressor and pinned Byers to retain the championship . Moolah 's first World Championship reign lasted over ten years . Moolah successfully defended the belt against the top female wrestlers in the world , such as Judy Grable and Donna Christanello , while also purporting to befriend some of the biggest celebrities of the day . Moolah claimed in her book , " First Goddess of the Squared Circle , " that she formed friendships with Elvis Presley and Jerry Lee Lewis .

After June Byers retired in 1964 , Moolah was subsequently recognized as official NWA Champion , thus making her the undisputed Women 's World Champion . Nevertheless , Moolah dropped the belt on September 17 , 1966 to Bette Boucher , although she regained the title just weeks later . She also traded the belt with Yukiko Tomoe during a tour of Japan in 1968 . On July 1 , 1972 , Moolah became the first woman allowed to wrestle at Madison Square Garden , which had previously banned women 's wrestling . In fact , Moolah helped overturn the ban on women 's wrestling in the entire state of New York , which the New York State Athletic Commission lifted in June 1972 . During her quest to overturn the ban , she flipped football player Roosevelt " Rosey " Grier onto his back on The Mike Douglas Show . Moolah continued an uninterrupted eight @-@ year reign before losing to Sue Green at Madison Square Garden in 1976 . Moolah regained her title a short time later . She also bought the legal rights to the championship in the late 1970s , and after losing the championship for two days to Evelyn Stevens in 1978 , began another long reign , defending her title for another six years . Also in the 1970s , Moolah held the NWA Women 's World Tag Team Championship twice with Toni Rose .

= = = Rock ' n ' Wrestling Connection ( 1980s ) = = =

In 1983 , Vince McMahon , Jr. began expanding the World Wrestling Federation ( WWF ) nationally , and Moolah sold him the rights to her Women 's World Championship . Moolah agreed to appear exclusively for the WWF , and thus became the first WWF Women 's Champion . The following year , singer Cyndi Lauper began a verbal feud with manager " Captain " Lou Albano , who long had a reputation of being a villain , that brought professional wrestling into mainstream culture in a storyline that became known as the " Rock ' n ' Wrestling Connection . " When it was finally time for Lauper and Albano to settle their differences in the ring , a match @-@ up was scheduled with Albano representing Moolah against the challenge of Lauper 's protégé , Wendi Richter . After much buildup and hype , the Fabulous Moolah lost the championship when defeated by Richter , who had Lauper in her corner , on July 23 , 1984 in the main event of The Brawl to End It All , which was broadcast live on MTV . Prior to the match , the WWF promoted Moolah as holding the championship for the previous 28 years .

After losing the title to Richter , Moolah aided Leilani Kai in defeating Richter for the title in February 1985 . Richter won it back at the inaugural WrestleMania , but when Richter 's relationship soured with the WWF , Moolah donned a mask as " The Spider Lady " and regained the belt on November 25 , 1985 , in a controversial decision . Richter was never told she would be losing the title and fell victim to a real @-@ life " screwjob " finish known as " The Original Screwjob " . Richter promptly quit the WWF afterward , while Moolah continued to be champion for another two years ? excluding

a six @-@ day reign by Velvet McIntyre during a tour of Australia in 1986 ? before losing the belt to Sherri Martel on July 24 , 1987 . She later captained a team at the inaugural Survivor Series . Her team ( Moolah , Velvet McIntyre , Rockin ' Robin , and the Jumping Bomb Angels ) defeated champion Martel and her team ( Leilani Kai , Judy Martin , Donna Christanello , and Dawn Marie ) .

= = = Semi @-@ retirement = = =

Throughout the early 1990s , she made appearances in video packages and at live WWF events . On June 24 , 1995 , she was the first female wrestler to be inducted into the WWF Hall of Fame . In the late 1990s , Pat Patterson and Ellison began jokingly discussing a comeback for her , which resulted in Patterson contacting WWF Chairman Vince McMahon about the possibility . In 1998 , Moolah and Mae Young re @-@ emerged in the WWF ( later renamed World Wrestling Entertainment , WWE ) . The WWF women 's division , however , had since moved away from the traditional athletic match @-@ ups of the past and now featured women competing in sexually @-@ themed bikini contests and strip matches .

Moolah received a call from McMahon in late 1998 about returning to the company . On the September 9 , 1999 episode of SmackDown ! , Jeff Jarrett invited Moolah , 76 , into the ring and smashed a guitar over her head . Moolah and Young then began appearing regularly in comedic roles . On the September 27 , 1999 episode of Monday Night Raw , Moolah and Young defeated Ivory in a Handicapped Evening Gown match , which led to a title match at No Mercy on October 17 , 1999 . The match saw seventy @-@ six @-@ year @-@ old Moolah defeat Ivory to regain the WWE Women 's Championship , thus becoming the oldest WWE Women 's Champion ever , though she lost the title to Ivory eight days later .

On the September 15 , 2003 episode of Raw , Moolah won a match against Victoria . Moolah had been promised the match for her eightieth birthday and became the first octogenarian to compete in a WWE ring . After Moolah 's victory , the " Legend Killer " Randy Orton came out and performed an RKO on her . Moolah and Young made another appearance at New Years Revolution in 2006 , during a Bra and Panties Gauntlet match attacking Victoria and stripping her of her top . She also made brief appearances at WrestleMania 23 and the 2007 Draft Lottery on June 11 , 2007 . Her last WWE appearance before her death was at SummerSlam in August 2007 , in a backstage segment with Vince McMahon and Raw General Manager William Regal .

= = Training and promoting = =

Ellison and her second husband Johnny Long began training women to become female wrestlers , which included Ella Waldek , Daisy Mae , and Katherine Simpson . Long later contacted promoter Jack Pfefer , who agreed to book some of the wrestlers at his shows . After marrying wrestler Buddy Lee , he began helping Ellison train the female wrestlers . After she left Pfeiffer 's promotion in the 1950s , Ellison found it difficult to book her trainees in shows due to Pfeiffer 's influence over other National Wrestling Alliance promoters . Ellison claimed Pfeiffer would threaten to reveal the pre @-@ planned nature of wrestling if any other promoters did not do as he liked . As a result , Ellison began selling cosmetics door @-@ to @-@ door and Lee opened a service station to make enough money to pay their bills . They later began to book their wrestlers , including Judy Grable in Boston , under promoter Paul Bowser .

In the late 1950s when the once @-@ dominant promoter of women 's wrestling , Billy Wolfe , was out of business , Ellison and Lee began to book their female wrestlers for more and more shows . They began calling their promoting business Girl Wrestling Enterprises ( GWE ) . Ellison demanded a lot from the girls of GWE , including that they had to keep their hair and make @-@ up done , act like a lady , and not date men who were in the professional wrestling business . In addition to women , Ellison also trained midget professional wrestlers , including Katie Glass in the 1960s . Ellison founded the Ladies ' International Wrestling Association , a non @-@ profit organization to help retired professional wrestlers , in the late 1980s . In the 1990s , she spent most of her time training female wrestlers at her school in Columbia , South Carolina . She also began training men ,

including Del Wilkes , and in 1995 trained more men than women . She also spent time training in Los Angeles at Verne Langdon 's Slammers Gym .

However , Wendi Richter stated that Ellison did not actually train the wrestlers at her wrestling school . Instead , Richter stated that Ellison accepted payment of the training fee ( which at the time of Richter 's training was five hundred dollars ) and had other female wrestlers within her camp ( including Leilani Kai , Judy Martin , Winona Littleheart , and Joyce Grable ) train the new recruits , and that these women did not get paid for their additional work as trainers . Richter also stated that Ellison required all women that received training at her camp to each sign a contract that allowed Ellison to function as their booker and receive twenty five percent of their booking fee . Trainees were also required to rent duplex apartments on Ellison 's property and they were responsible for paying her for rent and utilities . The training lasted six months and took place up to five hours per day inside a wrestling ring in a barn that lacked heating and air conditioning or fans . Debbie Johnson , another former trainee of Ellison 's , stated that she was required to give Ellison thirty percent of her booking fee , and her paycheck was further reduced as Ellison deducted travel expenses , food , rent , and utilities before paying her . As a result , Johnson worked for Ellison for two years before she received any money . Johnson stated that Ellison would refuse to book certain women in her training camp if they angered her , and that Ellison monitored her and refused to let her leave the physical constraints of the training camp unless she was accompanied by someone else .

Over the years , various female wrestlers have come forward with stories accusing Ellison of being a pimp that often provided various wrestling promoters with unsuspecting female wrestlers that would be used as sex objects . One of the most notorious accusations is from the family of Sweet Georgia Brown ( Susie Mae McCoy ) . McCoy , who was trained and booked by Ellison and her then @-@ husband Buddy Lee , told her daughter that she was often raped , given drugs and made an addict in an intentional attempt by Ellison and Lee to control her . Ida Martinez , who wrestled during the 1960s , also recalls that many of the regional promoters ? demanded personal services ? before they would pay the female wrestlers . In a 2002 interview , Luna Vachon claimed that when she was sixteen years old and training at Ellison 's camp , Ellison sent her out of state to be photographed by an older man . Although she remained clothed during the photo shoot , Vachon stated she felt taken advantage of by Ellison and the older man . Vachon also stated that her aunt , Vivian Vachon , witnessed Ellison abusing alcohol and having sex with her female trainees . Sandy Parker , a lesbian former pupil of Ellison 's , also claims that Ellison forbade her from going to any gay bars and tried to press her to date men . Parker says this enraged her , because " ( Moolah ) was two faced because she had her own little dalliances that we all knew about . "

As well as allegedly exploiting female wrestlers sexually , Ellison has been accused of using her financial influence to control the women 's wrestling scene and ensure that other women did not gain greater recognition . In addition to being a key participant in the original screwjob on Wendi Richter , Ellison used her influence to take over the spot originally held by her protégé Mad Maxine on the animated series Hulk Hogan 's Rock 'n ' Wrestling . Maxine was about to receive a big push by Vince McMahon but left the WWF shortly afterwards , as Ellison was unwilling to provide her with additional bookings . Numerous other former trainees defected from Ellison after growing tired of sharing their paychecks with Ellison . Women wrestlers including Vivian and Luna Vachon , Ann Casey , and Darling Dagmar moved into other regions where Ellison had less control and negotiated their own payouts with promoters .

Both Judy Martin and Leilani Kai told in later interviews that Moolah would collect the women wrestler 's pay from promoters , and after taking out her own pay , would only give the girls half of the money they were owed ( keeping half of their pay for herself , plus her own pay ) and telling them that was all the promoter gave her to give them . Martin stated that shortly before Ellison left the WWF in 1988 ( shortly after falling out with Martin and Kai due to Ellison no longer receiving their booking fees ) , she sabotaged the duo while they were touring Japan . Martin stated that Ellison contacted Japanese promoters and informed them that the Jumping Bomb Angels were supposed to drop the WWF Women 's Tag Team Championship to The Glamour Girls before Martin and Kai returned to the United States . This was contrary to the booking decision made by Pat Patterson

before the Japanese tour began . Unable to reach Patterson by telephone , Kai and Martin agreed to win the titles from the Angels since Ellison had already misinformed the Japanese promoters . Martin stated that upon returning to the United States , Patterson was angry with them and confirmed that nobody within the WWF made the decision for the title change and that due to her long @-@ standing relationship with the company , the WWF refused to listen to their explanation of Ellison 's deceit . Shortly thereafter , the WWF phased out the WWF Women 's Tag Team Championship . In a later shoot interview , Leilani Kai told that had things gone as the WWF originally planned , The Glamour Girls would have had a title match against the Jumping Bomb Angels at Wrestlemania IV and that Ellison 's actions had cost the four girls what would have been ultimately their biggest ever payday .

Women that chose to continue allowing Ellison to work as their booker were kept under tight control . Velvet McIntyre was forced to compete against Ellison ( whom McIntyre stated she didn 't care for ) at WrestleMania 2 instead of competing during an all @-@ women tour of Kuwait with a group of Ellison 's other female wrestlers . Their Wrestlemania 2 match lasted less than two minutes with the referee ignoring McIntyre 's leg being on the ropes while she was being pinned . Women that did not agree to Ellison 's booking fees faced limited options . Rhonda Sing stated that Ellison contacted her and offered to let her wrestle Richter in a couple of pay @-@ per @-@ view matches for the WWF in 1985 , but demanded she receive half of Sing 's pay check ; a stipulation Sing was unwilling to accept . Penny Banner stated that her retirement was due in large part to Ellison refusing to allow any of her female wrestlers to accept bookings against Banner , which severely limited the number of bookings that Banner was offered by promoters .

= = Other media = =

An animated version of Moolah was included on a CBS Saturday morning cartoon during this lucrative time , titled Hulk Hogan 's Rock ' n ' Wrestling . In addition , she appeared in one of Cyndi Lauper 's music videos , " The Goonies ' R ' Good Enough " . An illness in the mid @-@ 1970s meant Ellison had to pull out of the Bill Cosby movie Mother , Jugs & Speed , which had a role written specifically for her . In 2002 , Moolah wrote her autobiography , The Fabulous Moolah : First Goddess of the Squared Circle . The book has been criticized for keeping kayfabe ( the stance that wrestling storylines are real ) and did not reveal a lot about her time controlling women 's wrestling . Defending herself against these claims , Ellison retorted it was hard to fit all of her almost five decade career into one book .

Moolah and Young , along with several other female wrestlers , starred in the 2004 film Lipstick and Dynamite a documentary about the female wrestlers from the 1950s era . They also appeared on Late Night with Conan O 'Brien promoting the film .

= = Personal life = =

Ellison 's first husband was Walter Carroll , who became the father of her daughter Mary . Mary wrestled briefly but decided against pursuing the profession . Ellison had six grandchildren , five biological and one adopted . Ellison and Carroll divorced shortly after their daughter 's birth . Later , Ellison married wrestler Johnny Long . Marital conflicts developed when Long wanted Ellison to be a housewife instead of a career woman . In addition , Ellison claims Long was a " womanizer " . Ellison and Long divorced . Ellison also says that she dated country singer Hank Williams for four months in 1952 . According to Ellison , Williams proposed to her , but Williams 's drinking and heroin abuse forced the couple to go separate ways . She further claimed that he wanted Ellison to quit her wrestling career , which she did not want to do . Two months after the breakup , Williams died due to an overdose .

Later , Ellison met a wrestler named Buddy Lee , whom she claims was the " love of her life . " They were eventually married , and after divorcing in 1970 after nine years of marriage , they remained friends until Lee 's death in 1999 . The divorce was attributed to Lee 's affair with Rita Cortez , one of the wrestlers the duo was training . In the early 1980s , Ellison opened Moolah 's Hideaway , a bar

and grill which was operated by her daughter Mary and frequented by André the Giant .

Beginning in 1991 , Ellison lived with Mae Young in a house in Columbia , South Carolina . Her estate was located on a road named Moolah Drive . A midget professional wrestler named Katie Glass also lived with Moolah for over 40 years . Another wrestler , Donna Christanello , also lived with Ellison on @-@ and @-@ off for 40 years , ending in May 1999 .

During her return to the ring in 1999 , Ellison began experiencing occasional dizziness , and as a result , her doctor requested that she begin to wear a heart monitor . A few days later , Ellison was admitted to the hospital for what turned out to be two clogged arteries and viral pneumonia . She stayed at the intensive @-@ care unit of the hospital for 24 days , during which she was unconscious for fifteen days . After leaving the hospital , she again slipped into unconsciousness in the bathroom at her home , crushing several vertebrae . She underwent successful back surgery in mid @-@ December .

= = = Death = = =

Ellison died on November 2 , 2007 at the age of 84 in Columbia , South Carolina . According to her daughter Mary , the possible cause of death was a heart attack or blood clot related to a recent shoulder replacement surgery . Mary Ellison is buried in a grave plot at Greenlawn Memorial Park in Columbia , South Carolina . The plot appears to be a family plot designed for The Fabulous Moolah , Mae Young , and Katie Glass .

= = In wrestling = =

Finishing moves

Backbreaker

Schoolgirl

Small package

Signature moves

Diving headscissors takedown

Jumping snapmare

Missile dropkick

The Moolah Whip ( Moolah grabs the opponent by their hair and whips them through the air )

Managers

Harvey Wippleman

Wrestlers managed

Mae Young

Terri Runnels ( WrestleMania 2000 )

Leilani Kai

The Elephant Boy

" Nature Boy " Buddy Rogers

= = Championships and accomplishments = =

Cauliflower Alley Club

Ladies Wrestling Award ( 1997 )

National Wrestling Alliance

NWA Women 's World Tag Team Championship ( 2 times ) ? with Toni Rose

NWA World Women 's Championship ( 5 times )

NWA Hall of Fame ( Class of 2012 )

Pro Wrestling Illustrated

Stanley Weston Award ( 1991 )

Professional Wrestling Hall of Fame and Museum

Class of 2003

World Wrestling Federation

WWF Women 's Championship ( 8 times , inaugural )

WWF Hall of Fame ( Class of 1995 )

Wrestling Observer Newsletter

Worst Match of the Year ( 1984 ) vs. Wendi Richter on July 23

Other

JWPA Women 's Championship

USA Women 's Wrestling Championship