

Summary for H87-82-26

Bud Meyers is interviewed by Gayle Maloy in Fairbanks, Alaska on 9/27/85

Gayle Maloy interviews Bud Meyers in Fairbanks, AK on 9/27/85. He's best known for his career in real estate. His mother just passed away; he just came back from her funeral. He jokes that she was around 62, but she was really more like 88.

Meyers was born August 23, 1914 in Wilmot, MN. His father was born into carpentry/contracting work and was a great traveler, following jobs. Meyers's childhood was spent in many different places.

He doesn't like light bulbs hanging in the center of a room. He prefers wall lighting. They stayed in a lot of hotels when his dad was working, and they always had one bulb hanging down on a cord from the middle of the ceiling, and he grew to dislike that, he thinks. Rooms in those days were quite a thing if they had running water, especially warm water. There was seldom a bathroom, instead a chambermaid brought in a washbasin and a pitcher of water, and a chamberpot went under the bed.

Meyers has a year-and-a-half older sister. She lives in Tacoma. She retired recently after working for Bell Telephone for over 40 years.

When the family finally settled in Tacoma, Meyers took an interest in boxing. He also wrestled. His dad bought him boxing gloves when he was 3 or 4 years old, he says. His wrestling idol was Strangler Louis, the world champion, and his fighting idol was Gene Tooney, since they wanted someone to beat Jack Dempsey. He bet 10 cents on Tooney when those two fought, and he won, but never got paid.

The Northwest Gym in Tacoma produced a lot of top fighters, like Freddy Steele and Fred Linhart. Meyers sold newspapers there as a kid. He boxed at school, the YMCA, and the Elks Club.

Meyers graduated high school in 1933, in the heart of the Depression; there was hardly a smokestack going on the entire tide flats in Tacoma, the supposed lumber capital of the world. He worked for the WA State Game Dept., in 7 or 8 logging camps, a cannery, and other places. While he was in the cannery, Roosevelt signed the NRA (National Recovery Act), which raised the wages to 26 cents/hr.

He was working in the woods when he decided he wanted to go to either AK or Tahiti. On March 1st he couldn't stand it any more, and he left camp. He asked an older guy if he could borrow \$50. Amazingly, he loaned it to him. Less than week later he was on a boat bound for AK. He left his mother and sister behind; his father had died by this time.

Meyers took the steamer Yukon steerage from Seattle, a \$30 fare. It took 5 days to get to Seward. The train stopped in Anchorage, and overnighed in Curry. It took about 7 days all together to reach Fairbanks. Meyers had less than \$2 when he arrived.

He knew a fellow working as a dishwasher at the Pioneer Grill. He had a bowl of stew there for 50 cents, and stayed overnight at a friend of his friend's, in a room above the Comet Barbershop, where the First National Bank is now. It got down to -21 that night, and Meyers thought, "My God." He had played pinochle with some guys on the boat, who asked him in the Lane Hotel to join their trapping venture down in Anchorage, but Meyers never made it back to Anchorage.

It was difficult to get a place to stay. He'd met a couple Polish immigrants on the boat. He ran into them on the street, and they learned of an old man who had a cabin on

8th Ave. The man wanted \$20/month for it. They said they didn't have any money. The old man said, "Well, my last tenant put a Luger under his chin and shot himself in the cabin. If you boys will clean up the ceiling, I'll give you 2 weeks rent for it." They jumped at the opportunity. They hunted rabbits and bought a hindquarter of caribou for food. Two weeks to the day, Mike headed down for the rent. He walked with a cane and grunted each time he walked on one leg. They stalled for another week. They heard him coming the next time, and all lay down inside the cabin and kept quiet. He came back the next day and said, "Next time I'm coming with my gun."

Meyers got a job washing dishes at the Pioneer Grill. He was given one meal and \$25/wk. He worked one day and on the second day he went over to the N.C. Co., where George Preston was the manager. He wanted to arrange credit with the store to buy some groceries. He thought he flunked the interview, but Preston gave him \$25 credit in groceries. So Meyers bought bread and bacon and he and the Polish boys had a chow-down that night.

Meyers got to talking to a guy on the street about his wrestling/boxing experience. The guy suggested he go see Alaska Pete, ex-light-heavyweight champion of the world, at his room at the Pioneer Hotel. Pete invited him up to his room to "see what he could do." Pete took his shirt off and said, "Go to it." He was a real tough man. He said a fellow called Killer Lyons was going to wrestle in the old Eagle's Hall. So Meyers got set up with him. Pete said, "Of course you'll have to lose this first one, because then we'll have a return match and make a lot of money." Meyers said they put on a pretty good show. He lost 2 out of 3 rounds.

The best job in Fairbanks at that time was with the F. E. Co., and Meyers wanted to work for them. Jack Boswell, superintendent at Ester Creek, and Bill Shoddy, foreman, were at the wrestling match, so Meyers got acquainted with them. Eventually he got a job through Boswell, and worked for the F. E. for 5 years.

Meyers had two matches his first year here. He was manager of the high school boxing team, too. He lost both matches, one to Bob Rutledge, and the other to Gus Crutch, who outweighed him by 30 lbs. Boxing was popular, because people here had to come up with ways to entertain themselves, hence the dances, card-parties, and athletic events constantly going on.

Meyers was acquainted with a man named Morgan Jones, Welter-weight Pacific Coast champion, back in WA. His brother Harold Jones was among the top five middleweights. Meyers worked out with Morgan that whole winter. He came back to Fairbanks, where his promoter was Ernie Stollen. He had a couple of knockouts in the first round, so they started to call him One-round Meyers. Then he got knocked out in the first round, so they really called him One-round.

This side career led to his so-called championship of the territory in 1940. He lost to a college champ, who he almost beat in the first round, Johnny Orr. Orr was then defeated by the Anchorage champ, Young Tommy Cornwall. Meyers, who won his other semifinal fight, was then pitted against Cornwall. It took all his courage, but he fought him and he won.

When he started at the F. E. Co., he worked 12-hr. days on the bull gang. Then he came to run the "gun," a hydraulic machine. One winter he worked under ground, in Skoogy Gulch, on the way to Circle Hot Springs.

When the war came, he'd met a man who sold vegetables out of a wagon for Paul and Stacia Rickert. He bought the entire Rickert homestead, on 12th-18th, between Cushman and Barnette. It was gardens and rabbits, and 5 large greenhouses, where vegetables were raised year-round. This man, Jack, had a drinking problem, and his wife left him; he told Meyers he had to go and asked if he would take over the operation for him. Meyers bought it from him for \$600. They had a contract drawn up by Julian Hurley. Jack went on a binge and wound up at St. Joseph's Hospital with delirium tremens. After a day, Meyers went to see him and they signed the deal. The five greenhouses, a boarding house, and a flower business were all his. That first winter he had quite a time of it.

Meyers built a building right where First National Bank sits downtown, to make into a grocery store. He was all ready to open, when he was called to the draft. He went to Ed Stroecker at the bank for advice. Stroecker told him to get rid of the store. He sold it to Earl Houseman of Piggly Wiggly, and went to work at Ladd Field. It was a great disappointment to him.

He did defense work at Ladd Field, Big Delta, Jarvis Creek, Iliamna Lake, Dry Creek, Ruby, and Galena. During this time he helped raft buildings down the river from the C.A. station at Ruby to Galena. The contractor, Batchelder, had the contract working for Green Construction. Meyers describes how they dismantled buildings and rafted them.

In 1941 he was working in Galena until December 1st. It was very cold. He moved out of a bunkhouse and pitched a tent down on the Yukon. He froze his nose in bed when his fire went out. He wrote the draft board and asked if he could go visit his mother Outside. But at just that time he received a draft notice in the mail, and had to go into the military.

Meyers was stationed at Ladd Field. He was still subdividing Rickert's subdivision and selling lots. He bought in on a poolroom/apartment complex on the corner of 3rd and Turner, where the parking lot behind Woolworth's is now. After he got out of the service he ran the poolroom. He says he liked that business too much.

It was located right near the Line. He used to go out on his patio at night and peek over the top and see someone he knew about to go into one of the ladies' houses. As a joke, he'd yell, "Don't do that!"

One woman, Carol, was a kind of health addict. She bought flowers once a week from Meyers. He asked her how she happened to get into this business. She got out a scrapbook, which showed she'd been involved with politics in San Francisco. There was some kind of scandal and she had to leave the city. She came to Fairbanks to save \$40,000 to go back, where she was going to get in on a bar/restaurant/club establishment.

There was one man who came to see her, who was madly in love with her. He bought her a new refrigerator. She didn't know what to do with him. She decided to tell him (that she was a prostitute or that she didn't love him or that she was just here temporarily isn't clear). He shot himself in his room at the International Hotel. This crushed her, but she'd almost saved up the money she needed to leave. She asked Meyers if he wanted to come with her, to be her man around the place down there. She said he didn't need any money. He wasn't quite sure what she intended for him, to be a kept man, perhaps, or maybe a bouncer.

He continued selling Rickert's subdivision after he got out of the service. He enjoyed real estate. He got to know Warren Taylor, an attorney, and the father of Judge Taylor. Girdelle Lee--a southern lady, Taylor, and Meyers formed a group and went into buying and subdividing property. Lemeta (a combination of their last names), McKinley subdivision, Westgate subdivision, and South Cushman subdivision were all started by them. Meyers also got out of the poolroom he was in and started another one, the Upstairs. He got out of this, though, and he took a quick course in real estate at University of PA and opened an office in March 1952. He stayed with real estate.

Meyers sold one of the original lots of Rickert's homestead to Gus Theiss for \$325. Later, when he wanted to put his office there, he paid around \$60,000 to get it back. He wasn't anticipating too bright a future for Fairbanks/AK after the war, but he was wrong, because the biggest construction boom was yet to come.

He married his first wife on a trip to Edmonton. They had a daughter (now a real estate broker in Anchorage) and a son (who lives in Canada).

Joe Louis came to Fairbanks and to Anchorage and Meyers got to know him a little. He went on a trip to Winnipeg with him. He met Arthur Donovan and Ruby Goldstein as well.

His current vision of Fairbanks is that it's stable. He feels more confident about Fairbanks continuing to be a progressive city and end up a fine one.