Kelly Keim: This is an oral history interview with Charlie and Grace Meyers at their home out east of Judith Gap, September 10, 1997. I am Kelly Keim, and Cathy Luiken will also be helping with the interview. So, let’s start with you Mr. Meyers, when did you come to this area?

Charlie Meyers: I was born here.

KK: Okay, are your folks from here?

CM: Well, no—

KK: When did they arrive?

CM: My mother is from Switzerland, and she came to this country in 1906. My father was born in Wisconsin, and he came to this country working on the NP [Northern Pacific] Railroad. He followed the railroad until it got to Miles City, and then he quit the (unintelligible) and struck out on his own.

KK: He came from Miles City straight here?

CM: Well, no, no, he went to Butte.

Grace Meyers: Have to talk louder so we can hear you.

CM: He went to Butte, and he worked in the timber up there a little bit. For how long I’m not sure. Then afterwards, he struck out and just looked the country over. When he got here, well, he liked what he saw and stayed.

Cathy Luiken: And what did he do in Montana?

CM: Well, to start with...Well, of course he was interested in getting a place and—

GM: Got lots of questions? That helps.

CM: So, the question, what did he do in Montana?
CL: Montana, yes.

CM: Well he built a cabin here with the intention of taking up homestead, which he did shortly after. Then he was freighting, particularly hauling wool in this country, the (unintelligible) and he had a partner working with him. My dad had a six-horse team, and his partner, who was Jim Craig (?) who was a Civil War Veteran, he had an eight-horse team.

GM: Why? Be sure and tell them why.

CM: Well, they had the wool, the ewe wool and the weather wool. The weather wool was the heaviest, so that went on the eight-horse team. He done that for several years, making the trip to Billings and then hauling supplies back for the ranchers in the area.

KK: Were there several sheep outfits here then or just a couple big ones?

CM: Well, I don’t really know, but I’m inclined to think there were just a couple of pretty big ones—good-sized ones.

GM: Severance was one, wasn’t it? That’s where they haul the wool from. Severance Ranch which is over here on the west end of the Snowies, where (unintelligible) live now? Well anyway, that’s where the big outfit was, the Severance Ranch, and that’s a well-known name, Severance.

KK: I ran across it in some write up from east of here—

GM: West, west.

KK: Okay.

CM: (unintelligible)

KK: Oh, okay. Is that your dad’s cabin? This older building over here?

CM: No.

KK: Did he have a log cabin?

CM: Yes he did.

KK: I bet it was Swiss-style notching, coping?

CM: Well, no, I wouldn’t say that. I’ve never seen it. I don’t know what it looked like.
KK: So you don’t know if it’s still standing?

CM: Well, no, I know it isn’t standing.

KK: Okay.

CM: When he got married, he burned it down. This was the part (unintelligible) the new place where he took his bride—this part of the house right here. Before she got too familiar around here, he set it afire.

KK: Where was his wife from?

CM: Switzerland.

KK: Oh, okay.

GM: There’s a picture of the...from Switzerland up there on the wall. Stood there all these years. I think in the same location.

CM: The Alps in the background.

GM: But she wanted to come to America like everyone else, you know. She had two brothers here?

CM: Yes.

GM: So she decided to leave her job in London. She was working in London at a doctor’s home. She was the head cook, is that what you’d say? Cook?

CM: I suppose, or housekeeper, whatever they called them in those times. I don’t know.

GM: So, she left that to come to America.

CL: (unintelligible) where are your parents from?

GM: Right here. Well, my parents were from South Dakota, and they came out for homestead too. Everybody wanted to homestead, you know. Because you could get almost free land in those days to settle a homestead. So my mother had a homestead and my father had a homestead between here and Harlow (?) at Nigh Hill (?). You ever heard of that name? It’s no more, but that’s where I grew up.
KK: So they had two claims?

GM: Yes.

KK: Two different homes?

GM: Yes, they had to have a settlement on the homestead, live there two years and pay a small amount after you’d settled up and then it was yours!

KK: You had to do improvements?

GM: Yes.

KK: Around here, one wasn’t really enough to support a family, was it?

GM: Nor two either.

KK: Turns out two wasn’t enough.

GM: That’s the reason the homesteaders had to leave. I think it was that way all over Montana. Didn’t have homesteads in Minnesota. That’s where the people first settled.

CL: Yes.

GM: Are you from a farm?

CL: No, well, I grew up in a farm (unintelligible). I grew up in southeastern Minnesota which is, you know, there’s a lot of farms but I didn’t grow up in one. My father grew up on a farm in southern Minnesota. That’s where most of the farms are.

CM: I’ve got quite a scatter of relations in Minnesota.

CL: Oh, you do?

GM: Morris. You know Morris, a small place?

CL: Yes, Morris, Minnesota, yes.

CM: Lots of cousins up there. Some in Clinton. Where else?

GM: Don’t ask me. Can’t remember. Can’t remember.
CL: So what are your earliest memories of growing up in Montana?

CM: Probably going to a country school.

KK: On horseback? Or a wagon?

CM: Well, horseback, as soon as I was old enough to ride. There was a time...Well, we had the summer school.

KK: Really?

CM: Yes, my dad had an old Model T Ford, and he’d take us to go in the morning. A lot of times we’d walk home or hitch a ride, whichever was handy.

CL: How far was it to the school?

CM: About three miles. And, well let’s see—

GM: In those days, the teacher had all eight grades, not only that but she was a custodian and everything else that you could think of that a school had in those days, one teacher did it all. Her salary was very meager compared to what we have today, from 50 dollars on up.

KK: A month.

GM: A month.

KK: And usually a place to stay, right?

GM: Well, I think they still paid a small amount. They had to walk or ride horseback to get to the school. Sometimes several miles, which was a hard ship, and a wood-fire or a coal fire which was out when you got to the school. It was very cold. Sometimes it took them until noon to warm the room up! But you had to study just the same. The three fundamentals were very, very important in those days, which, I think, aren’t very important nowadays.

CL: Yes, it’s changing, that’s for sure.

GM: Yes, don’t have to use your head.

CM: Well, the case with our school here, the post office, a family lived there—just about a quarter of a mile from the school house—and they generally boarded the teacher.
GM: That one teacher came on a horse and buggy from Swimming Woman, didn’t she? During the summer months?

CM: Well, started that way, yes.

GM: What?

CM: It started that way.

GM: Didn’t she teach Vercail one time, and Swimming Woman the other months? Now you must be sure and put down this word, Vercail—V-e-r-c-a-i-l.

KK: Okay. I’ve passed the school. That’s a house now?

GM: Yes.

CM: That’s where I got my start.

KK: I wondered if that was the school.

GM: You were going to Swimming Woman—

KK: Yes, passed it on the road. How do you feel now that it’s somebody’s home?

CM: I think it’s great.

GM: They’ve fixed it up a lot, added a great deal, added to the school house and the workshop and their garage and garden and trees, everything. It wasn’t much of a, well, convenient school. It was just one big room and one great big round stove that took lots of wood. When the wind blew, it blew all the smoke into the schoolroom, so bad—

CM: She taught over there.

GM: —so bad that you couldn’t even have school, so, then we’d come home and have school at home. That’s the way it worked.

KK: The whole class, the whole school, all the kids would come? You would bring them home?

GM: Yes, well in my day of teaching over there I didn’t have as many. When Charlie went there, there were 20 in school, weren’t there?

CM: There were twenty-some...22 or 3.
GM: But they dwindled away because the homesteaders had to leave, so I had five, six, seven. That was all I had. I didn’t have eight grades, thank goodness.

KK: That would be challenging.

GM: Wouldn’t it be? But like I say, the subject matter wasn’t the same as it is now—reading, writing and arithmetic—very important, I think. How about you?

CL: Yes, definitely.

GM: I don’t know much about Minnesota schools, but Montana is not doing very well, not like they used to. Did you go to school in Montana?

KK: Not really, no. Outside Chicago. Before there were calculators, so I did learn to do math.

GM: Well, that’s more than you can say about most of the kids nowadays. Well, I guess you have to have it, or you can’t get a job, right? I can’t get a job anymore for other reasons.

KK: What did your early work involve, ranching?

CM: Yes.

KK: Farming too?

CM: Well, some farming, not on a very big scale. We always had a bunch of cattle. (unintelligible) had a permit on the forest up here. Then later I got the permit (unintelligible). Well, ever since I was up (unintelligible). We got married in 1940 and from that time on I (unintelligible).

KK: So you would drive the cattle into the mountains every spring or summer?

CM: Yes.

KK: Did you have cabin, a line shack up there to stay in?

CM: No, we just had...well it’s only six, seven miles back up in here. If you got up early, well, you can almost be back for breakfast.

GM: Let me add, if you were hauling a lumber wagon to bring salt for the cattle way up the canyon, it’s a long hard day, and I’ve been there.
KK: Which canyon?

CM: Timber Creek.

KK: Okay.

CM: That’s where my allotment was.

KK: Do you know of old cabins up there?

CM: Well, most of them has been done away with.

KK: What were they for when they were built?

CM: (unintelligible)

GM: Sawmill.

CM: Well, you know there was a shack up there at some point.

KK: And people, they were like homesteads that close or inside of the mountains?

GM: No. No homesteads, just forest.

KK: What did the people do that lived there? That built the cabin, besides the sawmill one?

CM: Well, besides the sawmill, just working for other ranchers. About the only occupation I’m aware of.

GM: I’d like to add that some of these people who worked for ranchers during the winter worked for their board and room—no wages at all. They were lucky to have a job, you know, and when they did work...what was the wages?

CM: Dollar a day.

GM: What?

CM: Dollar a day. Of course that was back in the ‘30s, things were (unintelligible)

GM: Yes, Depression days. You’ve heard of that and you don’t know anything about but you’ve heard of it.
KK: Heard of it, yes.

GM: It was much different when you had to live through it. But it was a good life, people were happy and honest, caring for their neighbors, not only one way or another, but they were interested in doing all they could to help neighbors. It was a good life, even though you didn’t have money, you had food and love and friendship. That’s what it takes.

CM: In those days everyone was poor, but we didn’t have sense enough to know it.

KK: I bet there were country dances at the school.

CM: Or in somebody’s barn.

GM: Barn dances, sure. We had 56 rural schools in our county at one time, and now we have none. Makes a lot of difference.

CL: So how both of you meet?

CM: How did we meet? Well, I would say probably in the classroom. We both went to the same school.

GM: The high school, high school.

KK: Where was that?

GM: Hedgesville, south of here, between here and Shawmut. You certainly must have gone through there in your travels.

KK: Been through Shawmut.

GM: Yes, north of Shawmut.

CM: Nine miles north.

GM: So, that was where we had quite a nice little village with a high school and three—

CM: We graduated in the same class in 1931.

GM: You keep talking, and they’ll know how old we are, pretty soon, won’t you?

CM: It’s no secret. I just had a birthday.
CL: Well, happy birthday.

KK: Cathy just had a birthday.

GM: You did?

CM: Well, mine was last month.

GM: Are you going to be a teacher?

CL: No, I already finished with school and I work...I’m a social worker.

GM: Okay. Quite different isn’t it?

CL: Yes. So do you have any memories of any forest rangers?

CL: Well, yes, a lot of them, their names have slipped my mind but, the first one I can remember—however I didn’t do any business with him but my father did—was Dave Lake (?) from Harlowton, well, from Judith Gap originally (unintelligible).

I don’t know what year that was either, but they moved the office to Lewistown. The forest ranger that I dealt with up there was Carl Yule (?), which was a very fine gentleman. He took care of the office all by himself, very seldom they even ever let him have an office girl.

KK: Yes. Where was the office? Where was his office, then?

CM: In Lewistown. We had a ranger station up here that he would stay in periodically if the occasion called for it. It was situated in the middle of a horse pasture. He always had his saddle horse there.

KK: Which ranger station was that?

CM: Blake (?). He knew what was going on all over this district. He was perfectly honest and as helpful as anybody could be. If he’d go riding up there, which he did most of the time, and he seen something wrong like if I had a dead or a sick animal or something like that, he’d either send me a card or come down and tell me or whatever. Over the years, we got to be pretty good friends. Then he retired, after that we had several rangers that were looking after this district, most of that was out of the Lewistown office. I don’t know when they moved back to Harlow [Harlowton] either but they’ve been there for quite a number of years now.

KK: There’s a trail. They’ve changed the name of Swimming Woman...or Halfmoon (?) Trail to Real Horn (?) Trail.
GM: On the other side of the mountain?

KK: Yes.

GM: I think I read that in the Argus [Lewistown News-Argus].

KK: So the ranger was in the mountains more often in the past than they are now?

CM: Yes. When you think about one man doing it all, he knew what was going on over there.

KK: He fought fires then?

CM: Yes.

KK: Did you ever...were you involved in any firefighting?

CM: Yes, a few times.

KK: Tell us about that.

CM: Well, the most recent one was one over in the Swimming Woman Canyon. There’s a fire got started over there. I don’t know how but lightning, I suppose. Carl Yearhorn’s (?) barn...he did what he could there, and he left it when he felt it was safe to do so. Shortly after, the wind come up, and it started up. They chewed him out in fine shape for not doing his job and taking care of that fire, which I felt was very unjust. I went over there to volunteer my help. It was inside the canyon and burning up on the east side. By the time I got up there, there was quite a crew there. I don’t know if you’re familiar with the name Stanley Allen (?)?

KK: Just a little.

CM: He had a place over (unintelligible), and he was running the crew because he was familiar with that (unintelligible). I think I was there a day and a night, then I came back the next morning. They had a kitchen set-up there with a cook car and the whole deal, and the crew was getting fed in fine style. Beef steak and anything—

KK: Who organized that?

CM: Well, I think probably Stanley Allen had a lot to do with it, but I don’t really know that for sure. So, not too long after I got up there, they had made arrangements with a group of firefighters, Indians from the reservation, went up there in a big old bus.
KK: Which reservation?

CM: Crow. Anyway, they come up. Everybody was fighting fire, just having the time of their lives. They was singing and throwing rocks at squirrels and not taking the world too seriously at all. Well, I’m not sure how long they stayed, but on the way up, they knocked the oil pan off this bus. They were on foot, and they had to get a mechanic to come up there and rescue them.

KK: Did they realize they had this coming in? Or did they make it all the way near the fire line?

CM: I never had anybody really tell me about that, but on my way out, I seen the bus parked there in the middle of the road without...So they didn’t quite make it.

KK: Other fires?

CM: Well—

GM: Timber Creek (?). Timber Creek.

CM: Well, I don’t know if I should tell about that one or not. The forest ranger set the fire. We had a little skiff of snow that followed a dry summer. I mean, dry. All that duff on the ground, was just powder dry. So, he seen this skiff of snow (unintelligible) and he started setting firest and looked around behind him and the fire was creeping up on him. He’s beginning to get a little bit nervous. Didn’t know what to do, so some of us told him, they had (unintelligible).

KK: About when was this?

CM: Let’s see—

KK: Roughly.

CM: How long has old Kremlick (?) been gone?

GM: Don’t ask me. I don’t know.

CM: He was logging up there at the time; however, he wasn’t there this particular day. So finally they got on the telephone...or on the—

KK: Radio.

CM: —radio, and they managed to get in touch with him from Lewistown to come out and fire up his Cat [Caterpillar] and give him a little help.
KK: Oh, Kremlick the logger.

CM: Yes. Then Kremlick, he finally showed up in time, but by that time the fire had a pretty fair start. The fire department from Judith Gap came out, but they just had a small truck and it was quite a ways to a source of water to keep it filled up, so they really couldn’t do much for them. But anyway, he got around, a line around the fire, filling stuff in towards it—pretty good fire—and that stopped it. Then this forest ranger, he had guts enough to tell me when it was all over with “I still stay conditions were just right for burning.”

GM: You know this is going on tape, don’t you?

KK: It’s all right.

GM: It’s all right?

CM: I don’t mean to run anybody down, but they pull some foolish ones too. He was one of the worst.

GM: What I wanted him to tell about was the fire in 1898 or 18...1898?

CM: Well that’s—

GM: 1900.

CM: That was the big fire that was out here.

KK: We’d like to hear about that.

CM: Well, there’s two versions of it. See my dad was here at that time, and he was on the fire fighting it.

GM: He and one other man, were the fire crew.

CM: That’s all that showed up. Until it got further east. Then the people over there, they started getting concerned and finally fought.

KK: I read about that.

GM: Yes, it’s in several stories.

CM: Dave Lake wrote a story that said that this fire was in 1900.
CM: My Dad said it was in 98’ [1898].

GM: He was there.

CM: And for my part, I believe my father ahead of Dave Lake, so there’s two dates there, you take your pick. They fought this fire—

GM: Day and night, nothing to eat but the berries they found on the bushes, and there’s plenty of water, lots of water up there, much more than we have now-a-days.

KK: Really?

GM: Yes, the water is gone from the mountain.

CM: Nothing like it used to be.

GM: Anyway, they had all kinds of berries to eat and plenty of water, and they fought for three days. Then the wind kind of ceased, you know, and then that gave them a little leeway. Then the wind came up again, and it got over into Caras Creek (?), and of course there’s that rock wall and that kind of stopped it too. But it was a long fought fire with very few. A few ranchers came when it came close to their ranch, but otherwise, it was just the two firefighters. That left the mountain bare. You go out and look at the bare part of the mountain from Timber Creek to Caras Creek, it’s quite bare yet, and that’s where everybody got the cedar posts. Thousands of them, wasn’t it? That was the trees that were burned on the outside—

CM: That wasn’t cedar out there. It was fir.

GM: Okay.

CM: Very yellow (unintelligible).

GM: Pitch! Pitch, that’s what I wanted to say. Pitch. The center of the tree is pitch, and everybody came to get pitch posts because they last forever. You can see it on the mountain yet where it’s still quite bare, but it is being reforested. So, that was the end of the fire of 1898. We still have cedar posts in some of our fences.

CL: Okay. So it lasts a long time, then?

GM: Yes, sure is. They last a long time, and they’re good for burning in the wood too...I mean, the stove. The wood is real hot. Makes good chips, and we still burn wood in the kitchen.
KK: There were kilns, near...in the foothills near Neil Creek (?). Are you familiar with those?

CM: No.

KK: Did you ever hear what they were for?

CM: Not really.

KK: They’re not still there. I’ve been told there were some kilns out there.

GM: That’s where the new road is, isn’t it?

KK: Yes.

GM: Someday we’re going there. It’s a long ways from home. How many miles?

CM: I don’t know.

GM: Not very far. We always had to go Timber Creek to watch the cattle and so on and so on. It’s a good place to go. It’s beautiful. Have you gone up through the rocks and the creek?

KK: No.

GM: Timber Creek comes down, and then there’s rocks on each side.

KK: A narrows.

GM: Yes. Then there’s a west fork and the east fork.

KK: Okay. No, I haven’t been up that far. I should go.

GM: Well, you better go see it so you know what we’re talking about.

KK: Yes. Do you know of the Indian sites in the mountains? Did your parents talk about Indians visiting the mountains to get things—

GM: Not in the mountains.

CM: No, not really.

GM: Down here on the flat.
CM: They’d mention once in a while, and there used to be places where there...oh, what do they call them? Those rings.

KK: Tipi rings.

CM: Yes, there was a few of them, but they’re mighty hard to find any more now.

KK: Are they harder to find?

CM: Places have been plowed up. Rings no more exist.

KK: Were there many sheep in the mountains? Where sheep grazed?

CM: Well, there were some.

KK: Yes, drive ways?

CM: No, not (unintelligible). But, you know (unintelligible of Cook Ranch(?)) (unintelligible)? (Unintelligible sentence).

KK: Okay, way up on top?

GM: (Unintelligible sentence).

CM: Piped water out of the ice caves to water the sheep.

KK: Really? They piped it out. Is the pipeline still up there? How far did they lay it?

CM: It came down the mountain couple hundred yards or a little more than that. They had some wooden troughs (unintelligible) one side.

KK: Okay/ Canvas hose?

CM: No, these were—

KK: Iron pipe.

CM: Iron pipe (unintelligible). They were painted red by the way.

KK: Okay. Do you know stories of rum-running or stills during Prohibition?
CM: Stills? There was one in pretty near every coulee.

KK: No kidding. Still evidence of one here and there?

CM: Well, I don’t know if there is, but I’ve run across a few of them.

KK: Interesting. What were they fermenting?

CM: Mostly wheat or corn.

KK: And what was it called?

CM: Hooch, moonshine.

[Everyone talking]

KK: I thought maybe there would be a local name for it. Was it consumed locally or did it...did they export it too?

CM: Well, some of it was moved quite a ways. A lot of it was consumed on these Saturday night dances.

KK: Okay, the statute of limitations has run out. Was it very covert, and were there...Was the government or the sheriffs very interested in this? Was it very undercover?

CM: Well, yes, it was intended to be. It didn’t always turn out that way.

GM: But it could sure make them drunk.

KK: Can you think of any stories related to that?

CM: Well, I remember one time, my dad and I were on Timber Creek fishing. There was quite a little brush and stuff along the creek, and my dad and I was walking through there—easiest access to the creek. Pretty soon, here lays a disc, a little disc of cloth, and my dad said, “Well that’s a fine place for a disc to be out here in this brush.” He went over there and picked it up and here stuck a stovepipe. So, we got curious and we looked around, and pretty soon we found a trap door with a bunch of brush nailed over it and so on. Looked just like the rest of the landscape, and that’s where they had their still. Of course, there was nothing left there anymore except a few pipes, evidence of a fire, and whatnot.

I presume there was more like it, but I didn’t happen to see them. Then there was a fellow who had a still over there on Galloway Creek (?), which...You know where it is.

Charlie Meyers and Grace Meyers Interview, OH 365-004, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
KK: No, I don’t.

CM: It’s just beyond the next drainage next to Timber Creek. He got a job, this guy, hauling sawdust for who knows what. It’s a great place to pack a bunch of bottles in so (unintelligible). That truck would go down the road pretty regular. Always hauling sawdust.

KK: Was there a story on where the sawdust supposedly was going?

CM: Well, I’m not sure.

KK: Nobody asked any questions.

CM: Not really.

GM: There weren’t as many people on the road as there is now-a-days. You seldom met somebody when you’re on the country road. Now you can meet all kinds of people that you never even seen before.

KK: The Schwann’s man.

Have the Forest Service or the USGS [United States Geological Survey] changed the names of places in the mountains?

CM: Well, they have to some extent I think. Now, this little stream that we live on—I’ve seen different maps and goodness knows how many different names I’ve seen on this. Some call it West Burkhill Creek (?), some call it Elk Creek, I don’t know what other—

GM: Meyers Creek (?). That’s on the map.

CM: Then there’s the one drainage—that would be Little Carols (?)—be the next one over from (unintelligible) creek. It went by the name of the people that homesteaded in that coulee for years. It was known as Weber’s Coulee (?). Then, there’s another person that lived further up the coulee by the name of Franklin. So it became known as Franklin Coulee (?). I don’t know if there’s any other names for it or not, but...The Forest [Forest Service], I presume, just picked up whatever the locals was using. I don’t know. There has been some change, but I’m not aware of (unintelligible).

KK: How about wildlife? Did there used to be more or less wildlife in the mountains?

CM: Well, yes and no. In the early days, according to my father and some of the older settlers in here, there used to be a lot of elk in here. That was evidenced later on by all the elk horns you’d
see laying around. Of course, they’ve all been picked up now. When I was a kid growing up, I
never knew what a whitetail deer was. I never seen one. Now all that’s here is whitetail, all over
the place. The mule deer—they’ve always been here.

GM: Not very many at one period. We used to go hunting and never see a deer all hunting
season. Not like it is now, right? Now there’s more deer and more deer and more deer. Just
about eat us out of house and home!

CM: They’ve cost us plenty over the years.

KK: Why do you think the population has grown like that?

CM: Well I think Mother Nature takes care of it pretty well. I’ve always believed that the
whitetail and the mule deer (unintelligible). Some people disagree, but I had a little experience
one evening. I went hunting up at the north end of my place, and there’s a bunch of mule deer
out there on (unintelligible). Just grazing away, just nice. There’s a ridge coming down into my
field, and a (unintelligible) on one side of it. I was back in the trees just below and here I see a
big whitetail buck coming down this ridge. Come out there to the edge of the hay meadow,
 stamped his feet and snorted and the mule deer took off. They kept going. I got the whitetail
for his trouble. (laughs)

CL: What about wolves and bears?

CM: Well, we have bears around. The wolves haven’t got here, thanks goodness, yet, but they
will. I’ve had one bear experience that might be funny to some people. Wasn’t too funny for me
right at the time. I and another permittee, Kenneth Lawson, was down at...We were moving
cattle. My eyesight isn’t the best in the world, and I looked up the ridge ahead of me and I saw
something up there. I couldn’t make out if it was a black calf or what it, was but my horse
hadn’t started yet because I was up high enough so I could see. When I got up to where my
horse could see, he come apart and he wouldn’t take his eyes off that bear. So we started going
down the hill backward just as hard as he could make it go, and I was trying to keep a straddle
on him. I managed to.

We were taking cattle up out of a coulee up a timbered ridge, pretty brushy and hard to move
the cattle through. So, I was fighting my horse and trying to get these cattle up the hill, and
Kenneth, he was coming from over east with the little bunch that he’d picked up. When my
horse started acting up, why, his did too. So we had a miniature rodeo going on there for a
while, and I wasn’t getting anyplace moving the cattle. I thought, well, maybe I could leave my
horse and get something done. That was a mistake. I didn’t know if I was going to get back on
him or not. You’ve seen these Pony Express riders and know how they got on their horse on the
run and took off. Well, that’s the way I got back on him. (laughs) Oh, I imagine that would have
been really fun to watch. I wasn’t especially amused by it at the time.

Charlie Meyers and Grace Meyers Interview, OH 365-004, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield
Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
My horse broke out in a sweat. Was scared to death. We had a horse trailer about two miles away, and he was still carrying on and sweating when we got to this horse trailer. I (unintelligible) and shut the gate on him and then we had him. However, we did get the cattle moved.

You mentioned wolves. I can tell you a story that my father told us, and Grace heard him tell it too.

GM: I sure did.

CM: It was just when he was building up the place here, and he had a lot of need for corral poles. He’d walk up in the morning—take his axe and walk up some of this fire-killed stuff—and he’d cut poles off the hill. Then he got down—not quite home but he was in our field here—and here come a bunch of wolves. I remember there were seven of them. Didn’t he say?

GM: I think so, on each side.

CM: They kept circling him. They made their circle just a little bit smaller all the time, and he was getting pretty worried about it. He said, “I figured I could chop down one or two of them with my axe, but,” he said, “I didn’t think I could get seven!” So he started walking just a little bit faster. He got down pretty close to the house here, and he had a dog and the dog started barking. That kind of took the wolves off their idea, if they had one. He made it to the house, got his rifle, but it was too late. They were long gone. Said he had a little doubt in his mind that them wolves would have got him if he hadn’t got home.

GM: Now that was before the government had anything to say about wolves so the ranchers themselves did away with the wolves, but look what a mess we have now with the government and wolves.

CM: Get some of those wolves for a million dollars a piece or some such a crazy song.

GM: And you and I have had to pay for them!

CM: Time will come when they will do the same thing. They’ll have (unintelligible) or get rid of the (unintelligible)

GM: There are several people who have lost their lives already from wolves and many animals, and the government still insists we have to have wolves—they are so beautiful and they sound wonderful. Have you ever heard one?

KK: No.

Charlie Meyers and Grace Meyers Interview, OH 365-004, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
GM: Haven’t either. Can’t say that they’re beautiful for looks either. But you know, they have them in the art galleries, and people are wild to buy them. All over.

CL: Pictures of them?

GM: Yes! Great big pictures you know. You go to any of these tourist places and buy—

CL: Minnesota has a large wolf population.

GM: Yes.

CM: I don’t suppose you’ve seen the white wolf in Stanford.

KK: Oh yes, I have heard that story. Are there mountain lions?

CM: Yes.

GM: Not many.

CM: Well, I don’t know how many, but we’ve got an outfitter out here that gets one or two or three—as many as he’s allowed every year. I don’t know what he’s allowed to take, but he’s (unintelligible).

CL: Do you have any old pictures of growing up or ranching?

CM: I don’t think we do, do we?

GM: In those days, we didn’t even own a camera or a Kodak, believe it or not. So, no pictures.

KK: Were there lookout towers or lookout points in the Snowies?

CM: There has been a couple of them. I don’t know where they were, but I’ve heard people speak of them. Kind of fire watch or whatever.

KK: Did there used to be more roads back there?

CM: Well, it’s—

GM: More roads?
CM: Well, there was homesteads clear up to the base of the mountain, so then everybody had a road.

KK: Everybody had what?

CM: A road.

KK: Okay, to their place?

GM: The homesteads were—

CM: Just a wagon road, but you know, it was a trail that was followed.

KK: When they needed a road, did they have to go discuss it with a ranger? Was there a procedure, or did they just start building the road that they might need?

CM: I don't think anything was said about the roads there when they first started using them. There was a logging outfit up in Timber Creek Canyon that would leave quite nice roads up to their outfits, which we thought was great because we could take our pickup or whatever and haul salt up there (unintelligible). Plowed up the road (unintelligible) so you could drive it. On account of erosion, they told us, but anyway.

GM: I think those roads are more or less trails than roads. They weren't straight, they angled this way.

CM: They weren't straight, but they served their purpose for hauling up the logs. Sawmill wasn't—

GM: A road is a trail, a trail is a road. I guess that's it.

CM: But they had their Cat and dozer, and they would make a place where trucks could safely negotiate though the road.

GM: That tape ought to be awful full by now, don't you think?

CM: It was a great thing to...on account of fire.

KK: Yes.

CM: The fire fighters could get in there. (Unintelligible) take their airplanes and flatten out or dump water with their planes or fire retardant or whatever. So you don't need roads anymore. There used to be a road (unintelligible) to go up there.
KK: There used to be?

CM: I’d go on Sunday and picnicking and stuff of that sort.

KK: What were some of the favorite picnic spots or the popular creeks?

GM: Timber Creek. Timber Creek.

CM: Timber Creek and Carols Creek (?), certainly. Major streams from this side of the Snowies outward (unintelligible).

KK: Locals mostly?

CM: Well, yes, and then from some of the little towns around.

KK: More than now?

CM: Oh yes, can’t drive in there now.

GM: We need some facilities, you know, like a table and some benches and that. Because it’s pretty hard just to get down on the ground like we used to. The seniors need something, a place to drive and just get out and enjoy sitting on a bench or something and have a little lunch. They can’t do that now because there’s nothing there except a sign post saying that, “If you want to reserve this spot for a certain day, please pay 25 dollars,” or more. They don’t furnish anything, but they do have a toilet. That’s one thing that’s there; otherwise, there’s nothing. No water, you see, and no facilities for comfort.

KK: I’ll tell the ranger.

GM: We have asked him several times, and he doesn’t even listen to us. The Garden Club, especially, had written him a very nice, polite letter several years ago, asking if they couldn’t have at least one table and benches but no response.

KK: Where did you want these?

GM: Well, there’s spot up there on Timber Creek before you come...well, is it on Timber Creek? Yes, it’s on Timber Creek but no water. There’s no water in the creek during the summer, but it’s there. You can see it right beside the road. You can see the post that they put with this sign.

CM: Well, there’s a reason for not doing anything about it. Vandals would have them tore up in a little bit anyhow.
GM: That does happen.

CM: Which probably is true.

GM: Happens right (unintelligible) in the park. Why do people want to tear everything up?

CL: They don’t have anything better to do, I guess.

CM: I think so.

GM: That’s one answer.

CL: Well, we’re getting near the end, so I don’t know if you want to keep going or do you want any more information?

KK: I think we have hit most of the points.

CM: I don’t know if I was any help to you.

KK: Oh yes.

CL: Much help.

GM: Have you had other interviews?

KK: Yes.

[End of Interview]