The following transcript was provided to Archives and Special Collections by the Upper Swan Valley Historical Society with its associated audio recording.
Henry Meyer: We were high school sweethearts.

Joan Meyer: We got married at 19.

Suzanne Vernon: And you were married young and everybody said it wouldn’t last . . . ? (laughter) I get the picture. You had to come all the way out here just to leave and cleave so the parents would leave you alone?

JM: Yeah, we eloped.

HM: We had to go to South Carolina to get married.

JM: Because Henry wasn’t old enough to be married. He had to be 21. He needed his parent’s consent and they didn’t give it to him. This shouldn’t be on the record.

SV: What year were you married?

HM: 1951.

JM: May 11, 1951. We just had our fifty-second anniversary.

SV: 52 years. I am astounded at the number of people I have interviewed who have gone past their fiftieth anniversary.

JM: Oh sure. Nowadays that’s rare.

SV: What nationality were your parents?

HM: German and Italian.

JM: And mine were the same.

HM: Mother was Italian and Father was German.
JM: Same with mine.

HM: And we have five Henrys in the family.

JM: My father’s name was Henry and my brother’s name was Henry. He’s a Henry and his father’s Henry. And our son’s name is Henry III. They are all H.J.

SV: So name your kids for me.

JM: Henry John Meyer III. Jennifer Ann Meyer Styler (m. to Jim Styler); Zane David Meyer, and Peter Carl (?) Meyer with a “C”. Zane lives in Billings. Henry and Peter live in the Valley. And Jennifer lives in Arabia, where her husband is an oil engineer (Jim Styler, Walter Styler’s son). They’ll be back the end of next month to visit.

HM: They were up in Alaska for a number of years. Wherever there’s oil.

JM: Indonesia. They’ve been all over. Now they are in Arabia and we’ve been on pins and needles ever since this Iraq thing.

SV: So what year did you move to the Swan Valley?


SV: And you came from New Jersey.

JM: We traveled around some looking for a place to live.

HM: We were looking for the wildest and woolliest place in the USA and this was it in those days.

JM: There was no highway. There was a dirt road out there.

HM: Dirt road. We had an old ’39 Chevy. Our canoe was on top and all of our camping gear. Food in the back. Away we went.

JM: Two spoons and two sleeping bags. We didn’t have much money. . .

HM: Every time we seen a big city or we seen one coming on the map we went the other way. And then we finally got out here, out in the west. We were wanting some land to settle on, wanting to find a place. It wasn’t real easy. We ended up over in Idaho for awhile. And everybody that was over there would tell you, “Oh just get a mining claim” and you could get 20 acres or so and build your little house. Of course we didn’t know anything about mining. In fact we knew nothing about anything. So we couldn’t quite get in on the mining claim deal.

Henry Meyer and Joan Meyer Interview, OH 422-107, 108, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
Then we kept wandering around and somebody told us, “Oh, you go up in the Swan Valley and maybe you can find some land up there.” We started wandering around and we got up on this old road and we got stuck in the mud.

JM: Not very far from here. On the old highway just as you come down the hill.

HM: We got stuck in the mud up there. Along came a guy in a pickup and it turned out it was Ray Fenby and some of his relatives.

JM: We were looking for him. It was amazing.

SV: Why were you looking for him?

JM: Because he’s the one that was selling the land.

HM: We’d heard he might have some land. So then they helped us get out of the mud hole. He said, “Well I’ve got some land I might sell you.” We stopped and looked around and said, “Yeah, let’s buy it.”

SV: Was it this place here?

JM: Yes. It was 120 acres and we bought it for $3,000. There was no bridge or anything (across Lion Creek). We used a foot log for quite a long time. See we were here a year and Henry had to go into the Army for the Korean war thing. But it was just about over when he went in so he wound up staying in Texas and Oklahoma. We came back in 1954, I guess. Or 1953. He went in 1953, two years, and it was 1954. We had our baby, first son, in Oklahoma, and Jennifer was on the way.

SV: You had to be in Oklahoma because of the Army?

JM: Yes. At first we were in New Jersey. The New Jersey draft board would not give him up to the Montana draft board. So we had 13 days to put a temporary roof on this house. It was just a shell. So we had to get all these boards. I had to carry them across the creek on the foot log while he was putting them on the roof. And then we closed the house up, packed up, and went back to New Jersey and I stayed with his parents for three months and I worked in the pharmaceutical place. After that I was able to go with him to Texas. His father and I drove down there. Then he was transferred to Oklahoma. It’s an awful place.

SV: The day you came up here from Missoula. That was the first time you’d seen the Swan?

HM/JM: Yeah, right.

SV: You’d been clear across the country. Drove all the way out here . . .
HM: California, even. All over the place.

SV: What time of year was it?

HM: Spring.

JM: It was in May.

HM: It was actually – you know, we didn’t understand how late the winters lasted in this area. God, we went to see Yellowstone Park and it was all snowed in.

JM: Yeah, he wanted to hike over the snow and I said, No. We turned around.

HM: It was too early in the season to see the sights in all the national parks.

JM: It was up as high as the house.

HM: We’d seen some of the parks in California. The big redwoods and all of that. In those days the places were like empty.

JM: There was nobody there. You had your pick of the camping site that you wanted.

SV: What was your first impression of the Swan?

HM: Beautiful wild place. It was nice.

JM: We drove through and shut our eyes every time went through one of those big holes with water in it. It was just terrible. It was spring breakup and we didn’t know that. We never lived in a place like this, we lived in a town right across from New York City.

SV: Whatever inspired you to come out West and try to find someplace?

JM: He always wanted to live out here.

HM: It must be something that was born in me. I knew this since I was a little kid, if you can imagine that. The wild desire – I was going to Alaska – and I did all kind of things to try to get to Alaska but I never quite made it. I joined the circus – her folks, she used to be with the circus.

JM: When I was a kid.

HM: Her folks got me on the train gang and I worked with an all Negro crew and I thought, the circus is going to end up in Seattle and from Seattle I can get up to Alaska. It turned out it didn’t
work that way. The circus circled around and started back East and I figured this is no place to be. I’m not getting anywhere so I just got off of that job.

JM: My sister was an equestrian with the Aniferd (sp?) family and she was at the time on this circus. We went to see them. That’s what he got on to.

HM: I kept wanting to go to Alaska. Then the draft board told you can’t go to Alaska. They said, you are draft age and you cannot leave the continental USA. Alaska was still a territory. You can’t go up there, they said, you’ll never come back. Which I wouldn’t have! (laughter)

SV: Would you have gone with him to Alaska?

JM: I wasn’t married to him then. I was only about 18 or 17, I think.

HM: She would have went.

JM: I’ve been up there four times already. That’s because our daughter was living there, even.

HM: Anyway, that was my desire and that sort of pointed me towards wilder areas. When I couldn’t leave the US without getting in big trouble then I figured, well, I’m going to settle somewhere in this country that’s just as good. And Montana was the best place you could find. Just a great place in them days. You’ve got the Bob Marshall Wilderness and the Mission Wilderness and there was hardly any difference between that and what was right here in the valley at that time.

JM: It was pretty wild. When did you come up here?

SV: 1981.

HM: You missed the good years.

JM: But you know it was different then, when we were here. Well, go ahead with your questions.

SV: I don’t want to interrupt your train of thought . . .

JM: You were wondering how different it is now from then. We met Ray Fenby’s daughter Della Luckow and Carl Luckow and I don’t know if you know them or not. They live in Canada now. They lived across the river. They were – he must have told his daughter about us – and there was just us and the Fox’s and the Luckow’s and the Shea’s (Shay’s) that were around here, in this area. There was no other people in here in this area. She was a young bride of a year, and I was a young bride of two months. We really hit it off real nice and we became very good friends. We visited and she taught me how to ride a horse. All that kind of stuff. It was nice to
have a young person around to visit with. We used to go to other people’s houses and play games. They used to have potlucks in the valley here and stuff. Now it’s all changed. You hardly don’t see you neighbors anymore. Everything is so busy, busy. Television and stuff like that.

HM: Yeah, TV was the destruction of mankind.

JM: We used to actually have a lot more fun that way. I appreciated the electricity after living with gas lights for years. But it’s just different. You kind of knew everyone. Now I don’t hardly know a lot of people up here. Of course, we aren’t here much in the wintertime, either. We are not socializing that much, you know. It was just really different. We used to snowshoe and stuff like that.

SV: For fun?

JM: To go and visit, or something. We came home one night and it was about 16 below zero. We used to live in that little house over there for about a year. It’s a hunting shack on this place. This is the Kortbien homestead. Ray bought it from them and we bought it from them. That’s the only way you could buy property up here, in the forest, was that it had to belong to someone. It had one little room, 9 by 12 or something. It had a bed and a stove and a table. It did have a table and some cabinets. So we lived in there and then we put shingles and stuff on it. Then when we came back from the Army he hired some men to help him finish the house. I was pregnant and couldn’t do too much. We just moved in here. There was nothing in here. But we just moved in because we had to for the winter.

SV: Is this the homestead building then that we are sitting in?

HM: No, we had to build this.

JM: It was a little shack over there (that was the homestead) and that’s what we used to live in.

HM: It was 10 by 12.

JM: We lived in that for a year and a couple of months when we came back from the Army.

HM: So I didn’t have any equipment to speak of or anything else. But I was young and strong and kind of stupid. I didn’t know one tree from another.

JM: I still don’t.

HM: If you can imagine that. You had to learn all this stuff. The only way I could find out anything was to talk to the neighbors. And so . . . .

JM: And Mr. Bernowski used to live over there and his son, Andrew . . .
HM: And anyway, I wanted to build a house and I didn’t really know anything about how to go about it. And so I talked to all the neighbors and they told me how you get logs, and notch them and so forth. But each one would tell me a little different story. So I had to piece all these crazy stories together and try to figure out what to do.

JM: Mr. Bernowski helped you.

HM: Most of these logs, a good percentage of them, I drug them in by hand. I had a block and tackle.

JM: We drug them in, dear . . .

HM: I would fall the tree and then I would limb it. Then I would drag it. Dragging by hand. The house is only as big as it is because this is just all that I could possibly handle.

SV: They are good-sized logs, though. Most of the log homes that I have sat in and visited with people that are still in their homestead or early settlement cabins, the logs are this size.

HM: I s’pose that’s what you could handle.

SV: But you didn’t have a bridge yet?

JM: We did it on this side. That’s why our house is right here. We wanted to live on this side. It was flatter here.

HM: This was by the creek and you had to pack the water. There was no running water. The running water ran by the house. So you had to go out with a bucket and get your water and do anything else the hard way.

JM: It was good for your figure.

HM: We learned all the secrets from the neighbors, of course, about how you live in the wilderness or a wild country without all the modern inconveniences. It’s just amazing but you could do anything or have anything you had with all that modern stuff and it worked just the same only it was a lot cheaper. There might have been a little more muscle involved in some of it, but it was a good way of live. A simple way of life.

JM: One thing about Della was she taught me how to cook. I never knew how to cook. I never had to do nothing at home. I had three sisters. Mom told me to get out of the way so I got out of the way.
SV: When you first saw this property then, that first trip up here, what was your first impression of the land?

JM: We liked it. He walked us around the land, all this land, that’s what we did first. Then we decided between us that we would like to stay here.

SV: And it was wild enough.

HM: It was pretty nice. The road didn’t amount to a pinch of beans. It wasn’t like nowadays.

JM: That road was not on the hill there. We used to go out that way. It used to be there was a bridge on Lion Creek down further. But then when that bridge went out years ago the Forest Service didn’t put it back and that’s why we come in the way we do now.

SV: Fenby’s mill wasn’t right here, was it?

HM: No, it was down about five miles.

JM: Do you know Kathy Burkhart? That’s where the mill road was there. They call it the old Mill Road now.

HM: What Fenby was doing was buying up land from people that were having a hard time paying their taxes and so forth and he would just buy it for the timber. Then he would take the timber and log that off.

JM: Yeah, he logged it when we were here.

HM: That’s how he fed the sawmill partly, and then he would get some little sales from the state and the Forest Service and that’s what supplied the sawmill. There was just the two sawmills in the area, was Fenby’s and Strom’s. Between those two places that was where all the employment was. You worked for the Forest Service or some local logger or sawmill operator. There wasn’t much else to do.

SV: Did you ever wonder what you were going to do for a living?

JM: Actually, no. We were very lucky when we were here, when we first came. Henry asked him (Ray Fenby) and he told us he had a mill. Henry said he would be looking for some work and if he had a job he’d be willing to work. Well, within a week he had a job, running the green chain. Being Easterners, which a lot of people still think we are, they thought that he’d last a week and that would be the end of it. But they didn’t know that he’s a workaholic. He finally worked himself up to the sawyer. You worked there what, about 10 years?

HM: Maybe 15. Quite a while.
SV: I didn’t realize they operated that late.

JM: They operated even after that, because Henry quit to become an apprentice.

HM: I quit and I took a job up here with John Stark building log homes.

JM: To learn how to build log homes. He built homes on Lindbergh Lake.

HM: Working for Fenby; he was a great man to work for. There was two brothers, William and Ray. They were great people to work for but that type of work is just – there’s no real challenge to it. It’s mostly reflex and muscle. After a while you get kind of crazy in the head because you’ve got to work all day long and all day long your muscles are doing the work and your mind is setting idle. And the mind is going around and around and around trying to think of new things to do or what to think about next or what’s going on. So it’s that type of work. Then I got this opportunity to go and work with John Stark who was an old time craftsmen. God, that guy could do anything with the old hand tools.

JM: Did you know John?

SV: No.

JM: We met him square dancing at the community hall. We used to square dance.

HM: So I thought here’s an opportunity to learn something else. He come down and he looked at my house that I had built. He said, “Well, that’s not too bad Henry. You’ve got a little bit of talent. I believe I could make something out of you.” (laughter) Anyway, I thought it was a great opportunity. I told Fenby’s, “I told you I wasn’t going to stay here forever and I’m not. I’ve got another job.”

SV: Ten years though, that’s a long time. That’s a long time for a mill to be in business here.

HM: Well, the smaller mills I s’pose it was.

JM: John and Marie (Stark) were so very nice couple. His wife.

HM: She was the daughter of Cap Laird who owned that lodge up there.

SV: His house was all built so when you went to work did you work with him on his property at Lindbergh Lake or . . . ?

HM: In that area. He was building homes for other people, summer homes along the Lake. The lake was getting subdivided up at that point in time.

Henry Meyer and Joan Meyer Interview, OH 422-107, 108, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
SV: That's right, Dick Hickey was subdividing.

HM: It was kind of ironic to think of. Marie should have ended up with that whole blasted thing and a good portion of it. And John too, because he was her husband. They had built the house on the land up there and the father had told them that they couldn’t be taken off that piece of land.

SV: The one on Cygnet Lake?

HM: Yes. It was just a crazy thing. But when the father died and the mother-in-law (Tyne) of course cheated all the kids out of their inheritances. She didn’t really cheat them but that’s the way it turned out. So there they were, stuck, and he had a home and Dick Hickey couldn’t get them out of that house, yet he didn’t own it himself rightfully. So Hickey went ahead and said “I’ll sell you this acre or two around your house so at least you can own your own home,” and not go through all this hassle. Then of course he was dividing up all that land and I can remember yet, I told John, “Wow these lakeshore lots . . . you know they aren’t too awful expensive. I’ve been saving money for years. Why don’t we buy one and then we can put up a spec house on this land.”

JM: I would have loved to live up there.

HM: I could have bought a lot for three thousand bucks. And John thought about it. He said, “No, I don’t want to do that. I don’t want to work that hard that long. I’ve worked awful hard for a long, long time and I’m too old to get into that kind of thing.” So we never did do it. But when I think about that, God I should have bought a lot and just held onto it.


HM: Nobody thought it was going to get the way it is.

JM: Well it was Hickey that was selling the land that they owned the Lodge up there, Hickeys.

SV: Well I visited with Sharon MacQuarrie, Dick Hickey’s daughter. She’s always kept a piece of ground there. She grew up here. Was John doing furniture then, too.

HM: Yeah, he was doing furniture. This is John Stark’s table (points to table).

JM: He made our bed in there. This here (points to furnishings in the living room.)

HM: He was teaching me all this stuff. Boy, I said, this guy is a master at this stuff. It’s a lot easier to let him do it and get it done. Because if I was going to do it it’s going to take another twenty years.
JM: We were trying to figure out what kind of furniture to get and I went to see their house and it was pretty nice.

HM: We just had stumps. We’d cut off a piece of firewood and we’d roll it around on the floor...

SV: This is a little more comfortable.

HM: A little better than stumps.

JM: It took a long time before we got this house done. I think we just finished it just a few years ago.

HM: It’s actually not totally done yet.

SV: There’s a lot discussion in the valley about furniture making. Before John Stark started making furniture there was a man by the name of Pete Rude.

HM: I think I’ve heard that name.

SV: He apparently had a shop, a carpenter’s shop. Now the problem is some people think they’ve got Pete Rude’s furniture, and other people think they’ve got John Stark’s furniture. How do you tell the difference? If you saw them side by side, you might be able to tell?

HM: I wouldn’t be surprised that I could tell. John had this style of building the way he did things. It’s really unique.

JM: It’s all handmade. There’s no machinery work on it at all.

HM: It’s all hand labor. He had hand tools to do the job. He was good with hand tools. He was terrific. I learned from him. He was perfectionist. Boy everything had to be just so.

JM: He also carved a lot of animals, and fruit and . . . his stuff is all over the world. He shipped it everywhere.

SV: So he didn’t just build stuff for the people he built houses for?

HM: Well, the people in the area. He’d build furniture for anyone who wanted to buy it.

JM: Holland Lake Lodge.

HM: He shipped it out to different places.
JM: Hickey’s lodge on Lindbergh Lake was all his furniture.

HM: For him it was a way to fill in in the wintertime. The furniture was a good wintertime thing for him

SV: He did it in his basement didn’t he?

HM: Yeah. It was interesting to learn the different things that he knew. Boy, he knew a lot.

JM: He was a very smart man.

SV: What impressed you the most? That’s a pretty wide question. The different kinds of wood made a difference.

HM: Lodgepole mostly.

JM: It’s really easy to take care of. Wash it with soap and water and then wax it about five times and you are done. You don’t have to play around with it like other people do.

HM: It’s hard to buy the wax anymore.

SV: What kind?

HM: Johnson Floor Wax. It was a liquid and you could rub it on. I don’t think they use it anymore.

SV: What did he finish it with originally?

HM: Just put linseed oil on it and leave it. Then he would tell the customer, “Now this is what I do for my own personal furniture.” And they could put that finish on it or whatever they want on it.

JM: And it goes with your log house, too.

HM: When we went up there and we met him and we seen his log home, and everything he did, he did everything that was in there.

JM: You don’t see a log in his house. Everything is built in – bookcases, everything. Everything is really built in. It’s a beautiful house. I don’t know if you have ever been in that house. I don’t know who lives in there now.

SV: Yes. Vern and Joann Guyer.
HM: They bought the place next door. Mrs. Carney’s place. That was the house next door to John’s. Then they bought a piece of land on the lake, on Cygnet Lake and then they got Carney’s building. John and those people were very good friends and somehow they ended up with John’s place.

SV: I think they just inherited it. He just left it to them. I went out and interviewed them.

HM: They said he actually just left it to them. That’s amazing.

SV: Vern is doing the furniture thing. He learned a lot from John. He uses the workshop downstairs.

HM: Wow. He’s just taking right over. That’s good. But that house and all his work impressed me so. I thought, here’s a good man to work for. He knows what he’s doing.

SV: How did you meet him again?

JM: We met him at the valley – people up here were square dancing. So we square danced up here for about nine years. So that’s how we met him.

SV: So how long did you work with him then?

JM: My son, the oldest, was in high school.

HM: Yeah, that went on until – he was finally going to retire. He was going to get on with the State down at Goat Creek helping those prison kids or whatever they are, teaching them woodworking. And then I don’t know what happened. Something fell through.

JM: Marie died, wasn’t it?

HM: Anyway, he had formally quit working up there so I more or less fell right in line after he quit. He worked with me for a little while and we had a little bit of a disagreement on something and he said, “Ah, I don’t want to work that hard.” He was getting ready for retirement.

SV: Were you still building log homes or where were you?

JM: He started his own business with Lion Creek Woodcrafts.

HM: Well that wasn’t Lion Creek Woodcrafts at that time. I just kept right on building log buildings. We were hitting that just at the right time. When I started doing that with him it was almost a dying art. There was hardly anybody knew how to do that stuff anymore. All the old timers were dying off. And then things started to revive. People all of a sudden wanted a log
building real bad. They were getting to be scarce. There were only certain people who knew how to build them. Lucky enough I had learned from John so I was sitting right in the ideal place at the ideal time. So it was easy to get work.

SV: When people talk about log homes, there’s a lot discussion of notches. What style did you use?

HM: The saddle notch.

JM: We did it the old fashioned way.

SV: You didn’t do the Swedish cope?

HM: This is a chinking pole house, here. One log is just sitting down on top of the other, pretty tight. But it isn’t grooved out. We started, after awhile, doing that, too. Grooves and stuff. We’d fit these logs so tight with John you might just as well go ahead and dig the groove in there. You could get inside a house, when we’d build that and there was no doors and windows in there. You’d get the roof on and it’d be dark in there and you could stand in the house and you couldn’t see any daylight seeping in the cracks. The logs were that tight. And you hadn’t even put a groove in them. And then you’d put the chinking poles in them. We were doing such close work, to such close tolerances, that I figured that we might as well go one step further and do it just like that old timers, the old Finns and stuff did, and put a groove in there. We got into that eventually.

JM: You put insulation in between them, too, eventually.

HM: Yeah.

SV: Did you stay with the same size logs?

HM: No, I kept getting bigger and bigger. I was the one with the wild imagination or something. My imagination knew no bounds.

JM: It still doesn’t.

HM: And so I kept convincing John, “Let’s get a little bit bigger tree, and this and that, and things were changing.” Of course, he’d used to like to build with nice big larch logs if we could get them.

JM: Didn’t you float them down the lake, too?

HM: Yeah, there was a building or two that we floated the logs down Lindbergh Lake to get them to the building site. The road wasn’t that good back in there to those summer homes.
Anyway, it was like going on a vacation working with him. Not that it wasn’t work. It was pleasure. It was so wonderful. And to be learning things and to be working in a place like Lindbergh Lake, or on a lakeshore and to be working with somebody that was so extremely knowledgeable about almost anything. There was nothing you couldn’t talk to him about that he didn’t know.

JM: He was well read.

HM: So I learned a lot from him besides the log building and the furniture.

SV: When you started building on your own where did you get your logs?

HM: We used to buy them from the Forest Service. The Forest Service was easy to get along with in those days. They’d say, “Okay Henry, you want some house logs. Go out there and pick them out.” You’d go out there and mark your trees out and then they would say, “Well, we’ll just come and scale them and we’ll sell them to you.” That’s all there was to it.

SV: So you could actually keep an eye out for good straight logs.

HM: Right. Every time you’d run around the woods, you were looking at trees.

JM: That all changed after awhile. You’d have to bid on logs, and that’s what really messed a lot of people up.

HM: It got competitive.

JM: When Bush got into it, the logs got higher. In that time period.

HM: He worked for Ed Underwood, and Ed Underwood was another guy who did quite a bit of building up on Lindbergh Lake. He was another real craftsmen, too. Ed Underwood and Lee Wilhelm did the first prefab log building that I ever seen. They had that sitting up there on a lot up near the highway and they couldn’t sell that dang thing. They were having a hard time moving it. Finally they gave it to somebody. I think they got the building finally. But they were having a hard time moving a pre-fab building.

SV: What year?

JM: Probably in the late 1960s.

SV: That would sound right to me. The lots around Lindbergh Lake were being sold, so Ed was probably pretty active by the late 1960s.
HM: And Jim Busch he moved in from back East somewhere. He started working for Ed Underwood, for about a year. He learned a lot from Ed Underwood, and then he took off, he had a lot of money, backing, I guess, is what he had. He finally made a lot of money. So he started pre-fabbing the log homes. And for him it was a success. He knew enough people far and wide, to know how to go about selling them. He was a salesmen, is what he was. He wasn’t a craftsman. He was just a damned good salesman. And so he knew how to run a business.

JM: He made his money, then he quit. There’s been several people.

SV: Did you ever try that kind of log home building or did you always just . . .

HM: Well, we used to always build right on a site and that was it. But after awhile, your reputation spreads. And so I wasn’t going to leave home and go and work for these people all over the country who wanted me to build them a log home. We finally said, well if those guys can pre-fab them so can we. Doing all the basic work here. Get it all done and then move the building onto the site and put it up somewhere else.

SV: What’s the one log house that really stands out in your mind? One that was a real challenge?

HM: They were all challenges in one way or another.

JM: Probably the Foote’s place up there, you know the Horn people? Horn own that now? You know up on Kauffman Road?

SV: Falls Creek Ranch? You built that?

JM: Yeah, he built that lodge up there. There was a lake and then there was a bunkhouse they built, too. Busch built the swimming pool thing. I guess there’s some more cabins up there. We’d like to meet those people and we’ve just never gone up there.

SV: Tell me about building that?

HM: We made the furniture. We did a lot of stuff there. It was just quite a thing. The reason I got the job, I must have related well with this Geoff Foote, who bought that, you know. He was an outdoor type person. He was actually a school teacher in Missoula for awhile. He had the children outside and away from the school so much that the school people couldn’t handle his style of teaching. And so being more or less rich he said to heck with you and I’ll build my own school. He was the first time I’d ever heard about environmental education, he was the guy that was starting all of this and that was in the late 1960s.

JM: That’s when our kids were in high school.
SV: Did they go to high school here?

JM: We were just lucky.

HM: They just got to high school in time. Otherwise they’d a had to board out at Polson or . . .

JM: They had . . . the year, about four years before our oldest boy went to high school, they built that high school. Then when he graduated he went down there to high school. Our daughter’s husband was a senior that year. So about three years before they went down there they built that high school. Which was a blessing because I would have probably had to send them back east or we’d a had to home school them one or the other. I wouldn’t have them living by themselves, like they let some of those kids live by themselves and that wasn’t a very good thing to do. We had parents back home and they could have gone to school there. But it was a hassle around here not having a school bus. They never had one for Salmon Prairie. So you had to take them to school every day. I would just not like to have to do that again. Getting stuck and all that kind of stuff. Then when I had to start working of course I had to run them down there again. Then run to work and stuff like that.

SV: At the Condon Ranger Station.

JM: Yeah. It was okay while I was working there, but then they changed that District, they joined the district and we had to go down to Bigfork. Of course I had to run up to the school bus and then I had to turn around and go back to Bigfork. But we all survived. Now the others are doing it. Henry’s wife is doing it and all that stuff. I feel sorry for them because they could have some kind of little bus here. They should have gotten some kind of a station wagon or something they could have paid someone to do that.

SV: Well, it goes to Salmon Prairie now doesn’t it?

HM: It starts at Salmon Prairie because Dale Conley owns the School Bus lines. He used to pick up the kids where he’d come off the Salmon Prairie Road but actually his run didn’t really start until Missoula County.

JM: If he didn’t pick them up then you had to go up to about the county line. Like Leita (Anderson) she’d have to bring those kids to Salmon Prairie because they couldn’t go up to the school at Missoula (County). Now I guess they allow those kids to go up there if they want. Anyway that was different down here. They still have to be hauled to school by their parents.

SV: Too bad the Falls Creek Ranch didn’t just start a high school there!

HM: Yeah.

SV: How long did it take you to build that?
HM: A couple of years.

JM: He volunteered to work there for awhile, but that didn’t work out.

HM: Geoff said “Gee, you’d make a wonderful teacher.” So he baloneyed me into that. It was a terrific job. What I had I guess was I was living the type of lifestyle that he wanted to teach people to live. If you can imagine that. I didn’t realize I was doing something different myself. I was just the local yokel. Finally he said to me, “I’d like you to work with me, Henry.” So I said, all right. It sounds like this would be a great challenge. It would be related with people trying to do something for the environment, and not foul everything up.

JM: They didn’t last very long.

HM: They got the first session going there that one summer. It turned out real well, I thought, but it wasn’t for him. He was, he had too much money, is what it boils down to. And when you are not tied to anything, or never had to complete or do something in your life if you didn’t really want to, you are different type of personality. So when things got tough, he didn’t understand the old timers in the valley and how people talk and all this stuff that went on. And so he was allowing things to go on that was way out of line as far as what the local people thought it should have been.

JM: Morals and stuff.

HM: His morals were good, but he thought kids could handle that kind of stuff. They need more guidance than that. So anyway, he had the right idea about environmental education. It was a terrific idea. The people screamed a lot. He was trying enough, and he was trying to get help from the government, grants and things. Only he wouldn’t conform enough to where people would complain and then they got him cut off. He said to heck with it. He could do that. It’s too bad because he had a good thing going.

JM: But he had a lot of these kids that came in from different parts of the country. Those kids didn’t know nothing. A lot of them were rich kids. They didn’t even know how to dress themselves some of them.

HM: He had them from all walks of life.

JM: You kind of had to baby sit them.

HM: He was trying to pick out people from all walks of life, and he had the rich ones and the poor ones. The rich ones would pay and the poor ones got a scholarship and they’d go for nothing. He had the blacks and he had the whites and the Hispanic people. He was mixing it all up good and he knew what he was up to. At the time, I told him, “Geoff this is just a start. Just
the tip of the iceberg. You’ve go them in the Swan here now. Then we are going to go to the ocean and we’re going to do ocean things. Then we are going to the desert and do desert things. We’re going to spread this thing out and there’s just no end to this. It’s just too bad that he didn’t follow through. He really had something going. Sort of like Outward Bound or something. But it was interesting while it did last. I related to the kids real well.

SV: So that went on for a few years?

HM: That was only one summer season that we did that.

SV: How long did you build log houses on your own?

HM: Till I quit!

JM: He was 47 when he quit. That’s when he retired. I was still working at Condon when you did that. Then you quit and then you went back to it.

HM: I worked for Geoff that one summer. When that whole thing folded up then I just went back and did what I was going to do again. It was too bad I stepped away from the line of business in a way and then came back to it. It’s just how it went. It didn’t hurt things.

JM: He was away from home so long. Hardly ever got home till midnight sometimes. That thing went on and on. Somebody had a problem they had to sit there for house. I got tired of it. They weren’t paying him anyway. Geoff was paying the salary and he wasn’t. It didn’t work out very well with us. It wasn’t very good for my kids either.

SV: What are some of the other log homes that you built?

HM: I built that one up at Columbia Falls.

JM: Flathead River Ranch. The lodge. There was several school teachers and some people named Taylor up here that come from Philadelphia or something. Summer residents. Columbia Falls, some homes.

HM: I didn’t build a whole lot of homes. Most of them I did the whole thing. I did all the work, from scratch. Then when we went to do the logs I’d go out to the woods and select out the logs. Then I’d get my cat and skid them in. Then we’d haul them home and then we would peel them or haul them to the building site and peel them and start building so it was a long process to build one building. It wasn’t like you did lots and lots of buildings.

JM: Our sons used to work with him for awhile. Then Jennifer’s father-in-law (our daughter’s) was our partner, Walt Styler.
HM: Bill Logue and Don Guizzo.

JM: But then at 47 he decided he wanted to stop. Because of the income tax they were taking so darn much money off of us. I kept working and he quit. I stayed at Bigfork for another couple of years until I got my 15 or 16 years there. I quit when I was about 49 or going on 50. We have been retired ever since.

SV: Good for you guys.

HM: We figured it was much better to take the time. Your time is the most precious thing you have in the world. All the money in the world can’t buy it. You don’t want to sacrifice it for money. We never got rich and we were never going to be rich. Through all the years, you go through so many years where things are really tough, and you come into a winter, and say, “God, how much money have I got?” and you’d look in your pocket and you might have a ten dollar bill. You’d say, “Wow we’ve got the whole winter to go through on ten dollars.” We’d wonder how are we going to make this. And so living that type of lifestyle you find out how to get along with little or nothing.

And so at that time, when it came I figured we had piled up a little money. I told Joan when she went to work, I says, “I’m not even going to let you go to work unless we agree on something. You’re going to save all your money or all of my money. Each year we are going to make a choice about whose salary goes in the bank. We’re not just going to do this and blow the money. Or else it won’t make any sense.” So that’s what we did. We saved one salary. And then after that, fifteen years or so, we finally said, “Well, it’s time.” We don’t have enough to retire and think we’re rich but we got enough to retire, if we watch our P’s and Q’s and capitalize on what we’ve learned all these years. How to get along on little or nothing. And so we’ve been doing that ever since.

SV: What’s the most important thing we’re supposed to do then? How do you survive the rest of your retirement?

HM: You have to invest your money in something so you have some type of income. There’s a million investments. I don’t think any are foolproof. Some safe thing. Put your money in something. To me it’s like buying a slave. They used to talk about slaves. Your money is a slave. If you take your money and put it in the right place it’s out there working and working and working. It works 24 hours a day. You go to bed at night and sleep good and your slave is still slaving away. You get a few slaves out there and you can relax.

SV: But you don’t spend very much?

HM: You can’t. You don’t have it. We were on a cash basis. And that’s one thing that nowadays it’s almost unheard of. When we go to get a credit card we couldn’t get a credit card. Like VISA cards and things? We threw them away. Didn’t want them. Then we found out it is handy to
have those, so we applied and they wouldn’t give us one because we never ever borrowed money. So you have no credit rating and you have an address like Swan Lake, Montana, and they don’t think you even exist. There’s no street number and nothing on here. Who’s he trying to kid?

JM: We do have an ATM card at our bank account. It’s better because it’s paid for when you buy it. We don’t want to have credit. We don’t like to have bills.

SV: So what have you done for fun, then, since you retired.

HM: We just lived on a few dollars, a few slaves we had working out there. Lived on their income.

JM: I quit my job in 1981, in April. In October of that year we went over to Hawaii and stayed over there for nine months. We lived over there on Maui. I got kind of homesick so we came home. After that, we’ve been going down to Mexico and we’ve been to Alaska. Spent three months going through Canada and Alaska. We’ve taken a trip down the East Coast and through the Midwest, Florida. Went to Washington DC and stayed three weeks going through the museums and stuff. We like that. That was on our eastern trip. Went down the coast. I don’t know how many states we hit that year.

SV: What keeps bringing you back here?

HM: This is home.

JM: The summers. I have to come home. I get very homesick. I have to come to my house. Like a lot of people are selling their homes and living in these motor homes. I could not do that. A lot of other people I’ve spoken to say no they can’t do that either. You have to have someplace to come to and our children are here and the grandkids. Some of them. . .

[End of Tape 1, Side B]
HM: You know you look around the rest of the country and you think you’d like to buy a second home or build a second home or have a second place to live and there’s hardly anything that compares to Montana.

JM: Arizona is very barren, no trees. Very expensive in some places and other places not but what they show you, then it’s not worth buying. We just saw one place we thought we might be interested in but we’d have to fix it up. I don’t know we don’t want to spent our life fixing things up

SV: Some things are unique here. But people around us . . .

JM: A lot of them can’t do it.

HM: You know what the old saying is? Anybody that lives in the Swan Valley has a few marbles missing. But I think we have the right marbles missing, the ones that are here now, compared to the rest of the world.

JM: A lot of people are afraid to come and visit. Like my sisters won’t come out and visit me here, my two sisters. We’ve been begging them to come out, offering to pay their way. I don’t know what it is. I know they don’t like leaving their kids. The first thing they’ll ask you – in fact the one sister one year asked me – if the Indians were living out here, were they still living in tipis. And the first thing they’ll ask you, too, is aren’t you afraid of the bears? And that is so really stupid. I’ve had that at the ranger station so much, and I used to tell them there’s no reason to be afraid of a bear. If they are going to charge at you, yes, but they are more afraid of you. I enjoy looking at them, and seeing them. We’ve had them out here in the yard, here and they don’t bother. Not much. They’ve been here.

SV: You’ve got dogs.

JM: No, we just got those dogs a year ago.

HM: Those are Mexican dogs.

JM: Someone was trying to drown these two puppies on the beach and when we arrived, and I looked down from where we were going to camp and there by the water what looked like an old dead fish or something. So we went down to look at it and it was a little puppy, about that big. Maybe a day old. So we took it and we dried it and put it in a little box. Tried to get it some milk by sticking its nose in a dish. We went to bed that evening and Henry, I didn’t hear it, but Henry said he heard another puppy whining somewhere. So he went out and there was another puppy in the brush. So we brought that in and put that in the box. And he came back in and he
heard another one, so he went out and brought that in. (laughter) I told him not to go out anymore.

So we had three little puppies there and we kept them in our camper for about a month and we had to teach them how to drink because we didn’t have any bottles or anything. In about a month they were getting to climbing out of the box and we only had about that much room to move in that camper so we just put them outside. We built — people had old bricks down there — and we built them a place to stay with the help of everyone else on the beach, you know. Some people came around for Halloween, a young lady with her children, a young mother. Henry asked them if they wanted a puppy. So we did give them a third puppy. No one wanted these two because they were females. We couldn’t even give them to the vet, he had an animal shelter, and we couldn’t give them away because they were females. Nobody wanted a female. So we brought them home with us and named them Sandy and Bushy. We got them spayed and took them back to Mexico with us last year and they really enjoyed the beach again and everybody really enjoyed them to see how they’d grown and everything. So we are kind of stuck with two dogs and we really didn’t want any more dogs. We had dogs, quite a few, but they finally died off and we decided not to have any more dogs.

We sold our cows.

HM: When we retired, we got rid of all our stock and the animals. Figured we were free to do what we wanted to.

JM: Sold the horse.

HM: The dogs did serve a purpose. They kept the bears away. We used to try and raise some pigs every now and then just to have a variance in the meat and the bears would come in and harvest those pigs, all the time. Before you know the bear’s running off with your pig then you’d have to shoot the bear, and eat the bear.

SV: You had cattle, too?

HM: I was trying to raise cows and clear land. Do everything. Start from scratch. I didn’t realize it but it’s impossible for one man to just start a ranch from nothing and get it to where it would be a successful operation, unless you had an awful lot of money or something, or you can hire a lot of help. You just can’t do it. It takes time, a lot of time.

JM: And hay. That’s why we bought where our son Henry lives, we bought another 80 acres down there, Simmons Meadow. We used to hay that and the kids and Henry and I we cleared this field over here, we cut the trees over here.

SV: Kortbien hadn’t done that?
JM: No, there was just trees around here.

HM: When Fenby took the timber, he just took stuff that was three or four feet in diameter, great big stuff . . .

SV: Did he leave any? Did he leave one?

HM: There’s one big one out there, yeah, huge. It must be six or seven hundred years old.

JM: We’ve got a lot of lodgepole. We logged it.

HM: Then I logged it off again. I should be logged right now.

JM: We have to have somebody else do it.

SV: You walk through areas like our place and you see all these big stumps. And you think, if they had just left one, so you could remember what they looked like. They did in some places.

JM: There’s quite a story, when we left a couple of years ago we let the Boothbys live here. They stayed in our house while we were in Mexico. Plum Creek took all the trees down over there on the hill, just about. The one daughter would sit up stairs by the dormer window up there and she saw this one great big tree over there, big tall thing and she kind of fell in love with that tree. She wrote a poem about it and her and her dad pinned it on that tree, and that saved that tree. They said, okay, don’t cut it down. The loggers didn’t know what to do, if they should cut it or not. I guess the boss told them don’t cut it down. I think that poem has been kind of published around. More people need to go out and write poems I guess.

HM: It’s pretty neat to think that some big company, as impersonal as those companies can be, they still have enough feeling to where they go ahead and recognize that somebody had something special and they left them, which is nice.

I’ve seen the Forest Service – we did that once, there was a great big yellow pine, up near Holland Lake and it was huge. The top was dead, but it was still alive, but even if it died completely, you know it would stand there for another three or four hundred years before it fell down. So I thought boy that was something else. People should be able to see that tree and wonder about this great big tree and the story it would tell. So I went down to the ranger station. It was marked out in one of their timber sales. I said, “Geez guys, you don’t want to cut that down and take it to the sawmill.” What a waste. You can do it three hundred years from now and still get the boards out of it. Just think what it would do for the people and everything else. So they listened and said, yeah, that’s a good idea. So we’ll mark that out and we’ll take it out of the sale. So they did and then one of these stupid loggers come along and said, oh boy look at that great big tree, oh that’s not in the sale, well it should be you know. Cut it down. So it goes to show you some people have very little upstairs for values, or a totally different set of

Henry Meyer and Joan Meyer Interview, OH 422-107, 108, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
values. Some guy just wanted to see it go because it was such a big huge tree. “Oh. I cut that
down.” That’s the sad part of it, you’re never going to have that time back, that old growth,
that big, big stuff. Nobody’s going to wait 600 years. They are going to harvest that.

JM: They better learn that those trees give off oxygen and they don’t need to cut them down
like they are doing. It’s pretty bad.

SV: You made a comment when you first came here that the valley bottom was just as wild or
just the same as the wilderness on either side. Do you spend very much time hiking?

HM: Oh yeah, I’ve been all around. Hiked all over the Bob.

JM: We went into the Bob Marshall one year . . .

HM: I skied across the Bob Marshall one year in the middle of the winter all alone. I’ve done a
lot of stuff.

JM: We walked 200 miles, him and I, in there. It took us about a month. We hiked in there one
year. We had two pack horses. We led the pack horses and we walked. I don’t know what year
that was. We were in our early thirties. Henry’s mother and father came out here to live.
Henry’s an only child. They came out and stayed for about a year with us, then they moved to
Kalispell for a while then where my son Peter lives now they built that house there. Grandpa
died and then Grandma went to New Jersey and then she came back to stay in Kalispell until
she died.

SV: Did they like it out here?

HM: They liked it but it wasn’t their thing. They were city people. I was an only child. You know,
with all of the grandkids and everything right here they more or less made that crazy choice to
do that. They enjoyed it to a degree but it would have never been quite what they were used
to. And when you get old it’s hard to adapt to a real big change.

SV: When you went into the Bob was it after you retired?

JM: No, I wasn’t working yet.

SV: Did the kids go with you?

JM: Grandma and Grandpa watched them. Peter was a year or two old. One year we walked
about eleven days in the Missions, on the high country in the Mission Mountains. We’ve taken
hikes in Glacier Park and stuff like that, with the kids. Henry’s gone in cross country skiing by
himself. He’s also gone in for the Forest Service with Cal Tassinari to read the water –
HM: Snow course.

JM: You did that about four times?

HM: Yes.

SV: What was the best part of the wilderness trips?

HM: Just enjoying it, being there. Feeling that you could actually get along with nature and survive and enjoy the thing. The beauties of nature, what a story. There’s something about it, it just sucks you in, if you are born with that type of desire, you can’t get away from it.

JM: And you’ve done canoe trips, in Canada and those places.

HM: Me and Jim Stobie did the Bob Marshall in a canoe. We packed it over the hill and down between Ovando and Lincoln. Anyway, we were going to do that and we were going to push the canoe in on a wheel cart and the cart was giving us trouble. So I said to Jim, “Well, it’s time we said a little prayer: Lord help these tires . . .” It wasn’t too long and we had another flat tire and we’re right in the middle of the trail, broke down. Here comes the Forest Service, with a big mule train. They were going in to do some work or something at one of the cabins. So they looked and they said, “You got wheels under that canoe?” and we said, yeah. “You can’t have those wheels. This is wilderness. You can’t have a wheel in the wilderness.” I said, “There’s no motor and wheels have been here since Christ and before!” They said, “Well, Congress made a law and you can’t do that anymore.”

And so there we were and so I asked the guy, “Well, there must be just a fine you pay?” And he said, “Yeah, I don’t know what it would be, maybe $50.” And I said, well we’ll pay the fine and go on anyway. He said it don’t work that way. “If I see you again, I have to fine you all over and just keep fining you every time I see you. It will be a lot of money.”

So me and Jim we sat down and talked it over. The Forest Service guy was a very nice guy. He said, “I’m not against what you are doing, but you realize it would be my job if I allow you to do this? People talk and all the packers and everybody else that runs horses in here, they are all going to be excited and I’ll get in trouble eventually, and I like my job and I’ve got to support a family.” So we could understand his position. So we said, “We’ll think about it.” So he said, “You camp tonight and you think about it.” So we did and we decided, “We ain’t going to stop, we are going to go.” We decided to leave the wheel cart and pack the canoe. That’s legal and they can’t stop us from doing that. So that’s what we did, we packed that canoe in there. It’s twenty some miles over the hill, you know. It was a long thing. Jim headed up the mountain. Through the whole trip, in and out and all the messing around, he figured we did sixty miles of portage. (laughs)
So, but it was a great trip and we canoed all the way on down the river. We started right up there in the Danaher right at the headwaters in some beaver dams and worked our way down through the whole river. It was a great trip and we really enjoyed it.

SV: You are a real adventurer.

JM: He is. That’s why I wait for him at home. I don’t like rapids and stuff. I’ll go on a lake, but I don’t care for rapids.

HM: You know what my big tale is? Everybody goes here and goes there, and all their wives say, “When you coming back? Are you going to come back on a certain day.” I tell Joan, I started right from the beginning, “Honey, I’m never coming back. Don’t you dare put a time limit on me. That’ll kill me. If you don’t listen to nature, and you don’t do what you are supposed to do, you’re just going to die. It’s not a place to play around. You don’t make mistakes and you don’t make the wrong moves at the wrong times. You can’t be pushed with a schedule that doesn’t relate to what’s really happening in life right at that moment. So I say I’m never coming back, but I always get back. Eventually we get here.

JM: They give us a date that they think they’ll be back and sometimes they make it and sometimes they are a week late or something. I don’t get excited but the other gals do a lot of times. I just tell them they’ll be back. If they don’t get back they’ll be happy where he is, so. I just kid them and say, we’ll spend the money.

HM: Do you know Barney, Jette? Me and Barney and another friend of his, Dan, and we went into the Bob in the winter and stayed in there three weeks, on skis. Oh did we have a good time. He’s that same frame of mind. He just takes it easy and goes along and you do what you should do when you are doing it and we had a great time doing that trip.

JM: Is Barney up here now or is he in Missoula?

SV: Missoula. He travels a lot because of his jewelry. He has a nice store right in downtown Missoula. I interviewed Evelyn and I was trying to find pictures so I called Barney. He still owns property up here. We never did find the pictures.

Evelyn started with the history group in the early 1980s. So she’s one of the first people I met. I interviewed her several times, but not very much on tape. She didn’t like to be taped.

JM: We only came up here in ’51 and a lot of these people lived here all their lives.

We’ve canoed the Boundary Waters several times. And then Henry went back with Jim Stobie and August Carlson from Seeley Lake. He’s our best friend, he and his wife.

SV: I’d like to take your picture some time. (Tape off, then on)

Henry Meyer and Joan Meyer Interview, OH 422-107, 108, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
HM: When we made that canoe trip down the Bob we had a hard time recognizing things, it had changed so much on the river. The river area is cutting out and changing. We were kind of half lost. We’d canoe right on by places we wanted to stop. We wouldn’t recognize them.

SV: So if we had old pictures of the river we couldn’t use them to match things up.

What’s the best thing about having stayed here?

HM: This is as close to heaven as you can get, and still maybe be on earth. I guess it’s just a great place to be.

JM: Well I like it because it’s quiet. You have a lot of privacy. A lot of nice people. I became a different person when we moved here. I never knew people lived like this. Everyone was so friendly. Your neighbors all help you if they know you need help. You go back into the East and you don’t even know who lives next door to you. They have all their shades down and the curtains closed. And here we don’t even have curtains. There’s nobody to look in the windows. It’s a good place to raise children.

HM: It’s a noticeable difference. When we left the East and then we came out here, there’s just a vast difference in how nice the people are and how friendly they were.

JM: And helpful.

HM: Just unbelievable.

JM: Like we were here a few days, and I said, “Della came over. They brought us a gallon of milk.” Another lady, Mrs. Shea (?) – she’s gone now – she homesteaded over here. They gave us jam and preserves and things. Everybody that would come would bring something. The funny thing is we were invited to a potluck or something after one of the school activities one time. Believe it or not, we never heard of a potluck. They didn’t do that back there. We brought an apple and ate it outside the schoolhouse because we didn’t know what was going on. We went inside and saw all these pies and things. We were shocked. I finally talked to Della about it and she told me what it was all about. Next time we knew what to do. That’s things that you don’t know about. I never knew people canned meat. My mother used to make jellies and jams and things but I never knew how to do it. She showed me, we would do this together, and bring whatever we had. We didn’t even know how to skin a deer, did we?

HM: The first deer I shot I drug it down to the neighbors. I said, you know, I’m not so sure how to go about this. Would you give me a hand? They were real nice. So that’s how you had to learn. You had to learn the hard way.

Henry Meyer and Joan Meyer Interview, OH 422-107, 108, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
JM: Della had a washing machine. I’d go over there and wash my clothes. I never knew people had gas motored washing machines. We didn’t have electricity.

HM: We didn’t know about the gasoline washing machines, kerosene refrigerators.

JM: And they used to hay, then Henry went over and learned how to hay with them. Every summer he’d go over and help them. Della and I would cook for them. It was a different kind of life. When you go back East, when my father died I went back East after nine years. It was quite different. It was fun to look in all the stores and everything. But it was always good to get home again.

SV: You got over being homesick.

JM: After a while. It was hard because you are looking for the light switch and you are looking for the running water which was running by the house.

HM: It was a different lifestyle but it was great. To me it was just a big adventure.

JM: Once you learn how to do things. When we got moved into our house, we have more room and stuff and it was different. We had it tough having to finish the house. We didn’t have anything in here. Nothing. We had boxes here and boxes there and a stack of lumber right here to the ceiling, in front of the fireplace and sawdust all over. When I went and had my daughter – I used to have to go to town and stayed to have my children and I’d always be a month late having them so I’d be gone about six weeks. Before I had my daughter I went in and said there was no kitchen. So that’s how we got our kitchen. He had no kitchen and he had to batch and he had no kitchen.

We got that started.

Then we had to bring her back in a great big truck we had.

HM: The old Diamond T truck, a two-ton truck and that was our family car.

SV: What did you drive out here?

HM: That was a ’39 Chevy. Canoe on the top and all our camping gear.

[End of Tape 2, Side A]
HM: And about every second trip or so you’d have to totally recline the brakes and work things
over (don’t know what he’s talking about but probably the Diamond T) and then you’d have to
replace a spring leaf or two every two or three trips to town. It was just real tough on the
vehicles. To Kalispell, mostly. It was dirt road all the way to Bigfork. It was a rough road, too.

JM: You know, it used to be way up high above Swan Lake. They just built that road above Swan
Lake. And when we brought Jennifer home, there were hills and stuff you had to go up on.
Every time you’d start up a hill a logging truck would come. So three times he had to back down
on the way home. You had to back down until you got someplace where you could pass
somebody.

HM: The road wasn’t big enough for you to get by.

JM: That was a one-lane road. And one year Henry and I were going to town when we were first
married and then in the winter we got stuck in the ditch or something. The car went off the side
of the road so we started walking back home again. We met some people that worked . . . the
Blostenks (?) going into town with their family and he went back up to the mill with Henry and
they got a car and they got our car out. She said that she thought that we were out for a stroll.
She didn’t know about our stroll. She said they never knew what these Easterners were going to
do.

HM: It was a whole different ball game when you drove on the old road. When you met
somebody you usually stop and pass the time of day. Ask them what was going on and how
they were. If anybody had any trouble everybody stopped and helped you fix it, regardless of
what it was. It was a different kind of an atmosphere.

JM: Everybody knew when you went to town and what you were doing. Everybody knows –
they call it the grapevine – the Swan Valley grapevine – I don’t know if they still got it or not. It’s
funny the stories that you hear, they get bigger and bigger.

HM: But you think of those changes now on the highway. Somebody is broke down hardly
anybody stops. You just go on by.

JM: If they know you, they will. We do that in Mexico. If we see anyone stopped, we usually
stop, Mexican or American. A lot of Americans won’t stop for you but the Mexicans will stop for
you. All you have to do is stop on the side of the road to pee or something and they stop and
say, “Do you need gasoline?” Or “You needa (help).” Very few Americans will stop to help an
American. It’s amazing.

SV: It makes you think about those things when you come back to the States.
HM: It was that way here one time. We’ve just evolved to where civilization has run away with us. We don’t know what we’re doing anymore. We’re in the rat race. They’re still living a different kind of a life in Mexico a lot of them. They are nice people. Very friendly, very honest, very kind. They have a different outlook. When something goes wrong, a rig breaks down, they just sit there and wait. They know about how far they can go to fix things. They think well, it isn’t going to work. So then they just sit there and wait and somebody will eventually come along and help them and have what they need. It all works out. It’s just like they are on a big picnic.

JM: We would pick hitchhikers up who were Mexican. They are just going to town or going to work or something. That’s how they get there. They are very nice people. People are afraid of Mexicans. That’s ridiculous. They are very, very nice people. If you give them something, they always return something. And you can’t get ahead of them. Really, that’s the truth.

HM: That’s the same way the people were around here.

SV: What do you think are some of the bigger issues that we need to be tackling around here?

HM: Well it’s hard to say. There’s a lot of big, big things. The one thing that’s going to goof up the people, the old time people and the poor people is taxation. We’re going to get taxed right out of here.

JM: Because they are building more homes and stuff, bigger and bigger houses and more expensive. That changes everybody’s taxes. You can see what’s happening here. There will be big developments in here, too, because Plum Creek is selling all that land and you know who is going to buy it. We are just holding our breath here. We are the first ones on this creek here and nobody is above us. The water is what worries us. If anybody starts moving in, you never know that water is liable to get polluted.

SV: Affordable housing is an issue, too.

HM: It’s going to be more for the rich people. It could be. We got to figure out some way to hang on to what we do have. Maybe this little eco thing you guys are messing with, that might help. The Forest Service, they are a little bit more under our control than Plum Creek. Plum Creek is just a big corporation and they are interested in making money and they really haven’t totally goofed up. They have cut an awful lot of timber, but then when you look at it and say what is their goal? Their goal is to get that timber off and sell that piece of land for a great big dollar to some rich man.

JM: What they should do is re-seed it and not sell it all, save the trees and have more trees for later on, future generations. Not mess with the land.
HM: The big thing the Forest Service has done is they are over-harvesting, and everybody knows that, but how do you stop them. And even I think a lot of people that work in the logging industry understand that. If they think to the future and they think they want their kids to work out there as a logger, they are probably going to have to change the way things are going because there won’t be work all the time for a logger because eventually it will run out. And then you know, modern machinery, in the old days it took a lot more people to get those trees out of the woods. Now it’s getting to be less and less people involved and more and more high priced machinery. So there aren’t as many jobs out in the woods as there were before. People have to adapt to that and change and not think that you can say well, tell the Forest Service to harvest more timber. There just isn’t that type of work anymore.

JM: There’s very few men out in the woods that are cutting trees down. That big machine cuts them down. We’ve watched them right here do that. And then there’s another machine that limbs. They don’t need anybody really except somebody to lift the logs up on the truck.

HM: The machinery is replacing a lot of labor. But I guess that’s the way the world is going. We’re getting modern. That’s happening all over the world in many places.

I think this environmental education stuff, if that was done in the right way, particularly with all the young people coming on and in the schools. To make these people aware of what’s really happening in our country and in our world and how the little things they do in their everyday life really govern us. They don’t really understand they are part of the problem. We are all creating this problem. The things we do can help to solve the problem. But you got to get right down to your everyday life. You’ve got to learn which ones to do, and which ones not to do and why and have a choice. There are a lot of people trying to blame big industry – the paper mill down in Missoula – and different things. They say, “Oh those people are ruining things.” Well they aren’t ruining things. You are, because you buy their product. There’s not a corporation in the world, no matter how big and how strong they are, they have no control over the consumer. And if the consumer says, “No we don’t want your product” they’ll shut them down in a couple of days. And you could spend billions of dollars with litigation and lawyers, and lawsuits and all other things telling them that they are doing the wrong thing. You can’t stop them. But if you don’t buy their product you stop them dead right now. But then you’ve got to make that choice. People won’t make the choice. They won’t stop using oil. They won’t stop using timber products. But there’s got to be a halfway medium. A sensible way of using things. When I used to build a log building, I would tell people, this is a big joke, but I would say, “I guarantee my buildings for three thousand years.” In actuality they wouldn’t stand there three thousand years, unless you put a real good roof on them. And I say you got to keep putting a roof on them. I tell people I’m not building this for you. I’m building it for your children’s children. I said this building has got to go on. You know why? Because this tree, you can count the growth rings. The tree I’m putting in your building has taken three hundred years to grow. And I told them, I can’t justifiably go out there and cut that tree down unless this building is going to stand here at least three hundred years and give nature time enough to grow another tree. You can’t go out and harvest all the timber and wantonly destroy it or build

Henry Meyer and Joan Meyer Interview, OH 422-107, 108, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
cheap, crummy, cheesy buildings that won’t last. Before you know it you are overharvesting. So people have to make those choices of just the simple things, the things they do. You go to the store and they ask you, do you want a plastic bag or do you want a paper bag. It’s a big choice. Both of them. So if you take the paper bag that cuts down another tree, or it’s a wood product, but wood product, paper is very recyclable, 90-some percent recoverable. And then the plastic comes from the oil products, which I don’t think you can ever put them back. You can’t reharvest or regrow some of that. But it’s a byproduct of the oil industry so as long as you are going to drive a car or keep burning gasoline and doing all of that stuff why they are going to have plastic products and a lot of the other byproducts from oil.

SV: So you buy the bags from the Salmon Prairie school so you don’t have to choose.

HM: Right! Mexico-style. Or it used to be. Mexico went modern, too, and it’s a mess, a horrendous mess with the garbage disposal and all of this stuff. When you used to go to Mexico, they’d just hand it to you in your hands.

JM: You had to buy a bag.

HM: You buy some eggs? Well, there’s your eggs, “Here, take them”

JM: When we first went down there, in the 1960s, ’65 or something like that. We went down and stayed about three weeks or a month. When we first decided to buy something, that’s what happened so we finally went out and bought a bag that we could carry. That’s what you did. People had baskets anything, that’s just what you did. You hardly ever got a bag from anyone. And that continued for a few years even when we went down there later on. Now it’s all plastic. There’s plastic all over the place. Some of the Americans are kind of messy, but the Mexicans they just drop it right where they are. They are trying very hard to get them to clean up their dumps. We’ve always tried to be very careful while we are down there. Where we stay there is a dump so you can go dump your stuff.

SV: What part of Mexico.

HM: Down on the Baja, down near Laretto (?). It’s a very beautiful area.

JM: It’s about twenty miles from Laretto in the bay. It’s just a beach we stay at.

HM: It’s a national park. They’ve created like a water park, you know, and all the islands and the whole thing. They’ve tried to keep the commercial fishermen from overharvesting the fish. It’s really nice.

JM: It’s called Rattlesnake Beach where we got, it’s by Tripua (?), and one is a big bay there, the Bay of Escondido, and that’s where a lot of the sailboats are. And then down about a mile further, down along the beach, that’s where we are. It’s really nice.
SV: I’m looking at all of your beach hats on the wall.

(Laughter and discussion)

[End of Interview]