

## Herman Meinders

Herman's international business brings happiness and comfort to millions of people.

### Chapter 1 - 1:00

#### Introduction

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**Announcer:** Herman Meinders founded American Floral Services, which is an international, flowers by wire service based in Oklahoma City. It all started in a garage apartment and initially consisted of 137 subscriber florists. AFS became international in scope and ranked as one of the largest floral services in the world, but it didn't come easily. Herman Meinders was a persistent, hard-working person driven by high ambition and sound ethics. At first his competition didn't take him seriously, but after time they began to copy some of his innovative ideas and promotions. In 2000, American Floral Services merged with Teleflora to better serve the floral community. The Meinders Foundation has contributed to numerous colleges and universities, including the funding of Oklahoma City University's Meinders School of Business. You will now hear a rags-to-riches story, which our Founding Sponsors are proud to present on [VoicesofOklahoma.com](http://VoicesofOklahoma.com).

### Chapter 2 - 6:10

#### Herman Speaks English

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**John Erling:** My name is John Erling. Today's date is May 25th, 2011.

**Herman Meinders:** My name is Herman Carl Meinders. My date of birth is November 15th, 1937. I am 73 years old.

**JE:** Where are we recording this interview?

**HM:** Oklahoma City University at The Meinders School of Business.

**JE:** Where were you born?

**HM:** I was born in Pipestone, Minnesota.

**JE:** Your family is from Germany?

**HM:** Yes, my father was born in Germany. His parents were there in Ostfriesland, Germany. My father came over in 1929. He also had a brother that had come over earlier. He came over to visit with him and see what it was like here.

**JE:** He obviously chose not to go back because the political situation in Germany wasn't the greatest.

**HM:** At that time there were a lot of different segments and a lot of different organizations trying to take over. One time he went to Berlin and there were marches at that time. He was telling me that whoever the party was at the time, they would jab the people that were walking by with guns-harassing people.

**JE:** This was when Hitler was beginning his rise to power?

**HM:** Correct. There were hard times there with the unrest that was going on. I think he felt that was a good time to leave.

**JE:** Yes and never go back. He went to Pipestone, didn't he?

**HM:** Originally when my father landed in Ellis Island, he took a train to South Dakota where his brother was. He spent some time there and then he wound up working on a farm in South Dakota. Of course he couldn't speak the language. The farmer that he was staying with and working for, his wife was a schoolteacher. But back in those days everyone helped milk cows. She helped with the farming and she would be milking one cow and my father would be milking the cow next to her cow. They would talk and she would teach him the English language.

**JE:** What was your father's name?

**HM:** Harold Meinders. When he was born it was Hero Meinders. However, when he came through Ellis Island they told him that he couldn't have the name Hero. So they gave him the name Harold. They asked him what his middle name was and he said he didn't have one. So they put down Harold None Meinders and that's what it said on his driver's license.

**JE:** Somewhere in the early years then he started a business?

**HM:** Yes, after working on the farm he moved to Pipestone, Minnesota and became friends with a man that was the implement dealer. I think he loaned him some money and helped him buy a truck and he did portable feed grinding. He would go from farm to farm to grind their corn so they could feed it to the cattle. This was about 1931. It was a hard time, but he seemed to do all right. He bought a second feed grinder and he also bought an oat hauler. It was some very tough times. He worked from daylight to dark, but he was successful.

**JE:** Along about those years he met your mother?

**HM:** Yes. My mother was living in North Dakota. She came down to visit her sister in South Dakota near where her father had been working on the farm. Somehow they met and started a relationship and soon thereafter they were married.

**JE:** What was your mother's name?

**HM:** My mother's name was Frances Buntjer. They lived I think in Munich, North Dakota.

**JE:** That's where her family came from.

**HM:** Yes.

**JE:** They were married during the Great Depression. Did they talk about that? Was his business affected by the Depression in any way?

**HM:** He never really talked about it. He was working hard. Of course I was born in 1937. I know it was hard times but I think overall my father did much better than the average one.

**JE:** He was the first one that came along with that concept of going to the farm rather than the farmers having to go to town to have their corn ground, right?

**HM:** That's correct. He had a corner on the market. There was somebody else that had tried it after he started, but it was very unique. He did not lack for business in the Depression time. He had all the business he could handle.

**JE:** You were born then on November 15th, 1937. Your mother and father were German-speaking people?

**HM:** That's correct. My mother's family actually came from the same town in Germany that my father was born in, so they had some of the same acquaintances. Their language was Low German, which was the language of that area of Germany. They continued speaking German and up until the time I was four years of age, all I spoke was German. It was wartime and the neighbors were upset about this. They came to my father and said, "If Herman continues to speak German, we think you are going to have to go to a camp because we can't have this." I think that was about the last that they spoke German. My father spoke very broken English. But English was the language and we never spoke German anymore. Of course later, they would speak it and I learned to understand a little German, but the regular German language, High German, I cannot speak a word of it.

**JE:** We should point out that because of the war, here in America, German-Americans were targets of discrimination.

**HM:** Yes, without a doubt. I know we hear a lot more about the Japanese but definitely Germans did go to camp. A friend of my fathers did go to camp.

**JE:** When you say, "go to camp," what does that mean?

**HM:** Well, the way I understand it--there was an internment. They weren't behind bars, but they had to go to an area where there were other people the same way and they were watched and put under surveillance.

**JE:** So it's interesting because there must have been people in the community that complained and somebody warned your father. But somebody else could have complained enough to have your parents sent to a camp? I guess that's the way it worked?

**HM:** I think my father had a very good reputation in the community. I think the neighbors were

right that it was time for me to speak English. So I don't think he had a problem with that at all. He just wished we could have continued speaking German, but he went overboard I think to make sure we didn't do it improperly.

### Chapter 3 - 5:52

#### J.C. Penney Company

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**John Erling:** Do you have brothers and sisters?

**Herman Meinders:** I have two brothers and two sisters. I am the oldest and my sister Linda is the youngest-she lives here in Oklahoma City.

**JE:** What do you remember about your home growing up?

**HM:** Well, my mother was very loving. She was a very good cook and a very kind, Christian woman. My father, being from Germany first generation, was very much a disciplinarian. He ruled the roost. He belonged to the congregation in Germany I believe it was and when he came over to the United States my mother was a Lutheran. He would go to the Lutheran church occasionally with us. He didn't want to become a member because he didn't want to take the lessons. He said he had already gone through that. I think after I left home many years later, he became a member of the church.

**JE:** What was the name of the church in Pipestone?

**HM:** St. Paul Lutheran Church.

**JE:** Is that the Missouri Synod?

**HM:** That's the Missouri Synod, yes. It's a very strict original Lutheran Church.

**JE:** There were a lot of chores to do at home and I guess you pitched in and helped with all of that?

**HM:** Yes, not that we had an option. We had to milk cows. I swore that I would never do that again and I stuck with that. We had pigs and we had chickens, which required a lot of work. Of course in the wintertime it was very cold up there. We had to cut ice so the cows could get water to drink. We also had a heater in the water tank, which was outside. We burned corncobs to help produce the heat to help get the ice melted.

**JE:** You were young. At what age do you remember starting to do that?

**HM:** We moved to the farm I believe in 1941. Up until that time we lived in downtown Pipestone. So I started doing chores in about 1943.

**JE:** So you were working on the farm when you were six or seven years old?

**HM:** Yes.

**JE:** But I guess you just knew that was the way of life. You didn't think that you needed to get out of there?

**HM:** No, (laughter) at that time we didn't think of options. All we did was go to school and come home and do chores at night. In the morning we would get up and do the milking and go on back to school.

**JE:** What about utilities? Did you have electricity and indoor plumbing?

**HM:** At first we did not have indoor plumbing. Of course as soon as we could, my father did put in indoor plumbing, but that was a couple of years later. It was a big day when we got indoor plumbing. (Chuckle)

**JE:** About school, you lived outside of Pipestone but you went to school in Pipestone. Did you walk to school or how did you get there?

**HM:** We lived on the edge of town. There was an argument whether we would ride the bus or not. For a few weeks we got to ride the bus. Then they decided that we had to walk. It was over a mile so we walked to school in the mornings and walked home at night. Occasionally my father would take us to school, but 95 percent of the time we walked there and back.

**JE:** Because I am from that general area, North Dakota, I know that in the wintertime you had to walk through mighty cold, blustery weather.

**HM:** It was very cold and somehow it seems that we had a lot more snow back then. We didn't have the expertise at removing it as they did later on.

**JE:** And temperatures that were way, way below zero.

**HM:** I know that when I decided to leave it was because for more than a week it was more than 20 degrees below zero.

**JE:** And you were walking?

**HM:** Yes. That was the way you would get to school. You just bundled up.

**JE:** Tell us about your school life. What kind of a student were you?

**HM:** I think I was a good student. I don't remember my grades. I worked after school. I had chores so I didn't really have a lot of study time. I enjoyed school. I liked school. I think it was in bookkeeping that I did the state test in and I had a very good score. If I had studied, I would have probably been an "A" student, but I came through with good grades.

**JE:** You were quite tall for your age, weren't you?

**HM:** When I graduated from high school I was 6'2" and I weighed 136 pounds. I was tall and skinny. I went to the doctor because everyone thought I was too skinny. The doctor said, "Herman you are in very good shape. You need to put on weight, but you are much healthier than most people."

**JE:** Did you play a sport like basketball or?

**HM:** Well, I tried to do wrestling. In fact, I liked wrestling very much. I wrestled at 106 pounds

when I did wrestle. I was very tall. The competition had a hard time pinning me. It just didn't work—the leverages. Wrestling kind of interfered with my chores so I dropped out of sports after three or four weeks.

**JE:** You did chores but you also said you worked for somebody. Whom did you work for?

**HM:** I went to work for J.C. Penney. It was a great store and a great company. I learned a lot. I worked after school. I would get to work around 3:30pm and work until 6pm. I had various jobs there. I would sweep the floors at the end of the day. I sold clothing. I also got to print the signs with the prices of the merchandise on them on a little press we had downstairs. Later, after high school, I continued working at J.C. Penney Company. I was interested in becoming a Penney store manager. Somehow they entrusted me with the key to the cash register. If anyone on the floor needed change they had to come to me, which bugged some of the older employees. Ron Risch was the assistant manager and he knew that I wanted to be a Penney manager. He worked with me quite a bit. He said, "Herman, you really have to have a college degree. It's not required right now, but that's what's going to happen. By the time you get there, they won't look at you as a manager unless you have a college degree." So that's when I decided I had better go to college.

## Chapter 4 - 7:17

### Grocery Store

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**John Erling:** So you graduated from Pipestone in what year?

**Herman Meinders:** 1955.

**JE:** Are there people from high school that you are still in touch with and that you know went on to other careers?

**HM:** We are very unique in that every five years we have a class reunion. But there are 10 or 12 of us guys that got together every year and we still do. My best friend was Jack Ness. I was very close to him and that's how I wound up going to OCU.

**JE:** How did your father feel about that?

**HM:** Well, he had an eighth grade education and was doing all right. He didn't understand why I needed to go past ninth grade. Once I graduated with a high school degree he said, "That's all you need to have." But once I started working at Penney's, I convinced him of two things. Number one was that I was not going to live in Minnesota in the cold. Number two was that I was going to get a college education if I could. He finally consented. I remember it was in February of 1956 I believe. I told him I was going to look at Oklahoma

City University since Jack was going to school down here. That particular week it was more than 20 degrees below zero every night. On Saturday morning, before we were going to leave for Oklahoma City, it was 33 degrees below. So that was the last winter I spent in Minnesota. But my father and I did drive down to Oklahoma. The winter wheat was green here in Oklahoma in February. He thought a little more of it. He thought it wasn't too bad. I think it was in the 50s here and where we had left from, it was 30 below. So he understood why I wanted to come down here. I had his blessing.

**JE:** Then you enrolled here at Oklahoma City University?

**HM:** That's correct.

**JE:** Tell us how that went.

**HM:** Well, I came down in the summertime. Mr. Risch had helped with recommendations so I could work at the Penney's store here at 50th & May at Mayfair Shopping Center. So, I started working there in July. I went to a summer session class in salesmanship and that's how I started at Oklahoma City University.

**JE:** So you were working and going to school—was that working for you?

**HM:** Summer school worked fine. Then when regular school started I carried 12 or 15 hours. I worked 40 hours a week and I also pledged a fraternity. Jack belonged to the Lambda Chi Alpha Fraternity. I was very impressed with the fraternity and the brotherhood. I also pledged that same fraternity, so that first semester, between pledging and also working 40 hours—my schoolwork didn't do real well. So I decided the next semester I would carry 9 hours.

**JE:** At the end of that first year at OCU were you thinking this is great I am going to go back for my second year? What happened to you?

**HM:** I was working at Penney's during the summertime. Jack had gone home up north to work for the summer. We were corresponding all of the time. We decided that it was so nice in Oklahoma—we wanted to see what it was like in Florida. So we decided that we would transfer to Florida and go to Florida Southern University in Lakeland, Florida. So I met him near Chicago and we both drove our cars down to Lakeland, Florida to start school. I tried to get a job with Penney's down there and I was having a hard time. I moved into the dorm where the Lambda Chi Fraternity was staying. I was trying to get a job and enrolling in school, but it turned out I couldn't get a job. I didn't have enough money for school, so I had to drop out. In fact, I was completely out of money. The next step was to go to Tampa and get a job. On the way into Tampa I stopped at a grocery store. It was a Saturday. They said they could use a bagboy, somebody to carry groceries and asked me if I could start that day. So Saturday I did pretty well carrying bags for ladies to their car and living on the tips. But when I went back Monday morning, they said, "Well, we don't need a bagboy today, we only need one on Fridays and Saturdays." I said, "I really need a

job.” The manager said, “We don’t have a job for you, but the guy that sorts out the pop bottles didn’t show up—so if you’ll sort those out I will give you some money until that guy shows up.” I guess I did a great job sorting those pop bottles because he said, “I need you to work on the dairy case.” So I wound up keeping a job at the grocery store in Tampa, Florida. My first job was in the dairy department. I did a good job cleaning that out. I learned about payola.

**JE:** How is that?

**HM:** Well, Borden’s had nine rows of milk and the other company had three rows of milk and one company had one row. There were three different milk vendors. So when I cleaned the dairy case, which hadn’t been cleaned in a long time, I decided that all the milk vendors were going to have the same amount of rows and they were all going to have three rows of milk. Then the Borden’s man came in and he just took the other company’s milk out and just put his milk in the majority of the rows. I told him, “No. I am in charge now and this is the way we are going to handle this. We are going to give everyone the same amount of rows.” He said, “But we sell a lot more milk.” I said, “Well, yeah, you sell more milk because you have a lot more rows.” So he pulled out a pecan peanut cluster and he handed it to me. He said, “You can have this and let me explain it to you.” So while I was enjoying that peanut cluster he said, “We advertise on the radio and we are doing a little television advertising. We are in the newspaper. That’s why the customers are asking for our milk and we have to have more rows. So I negotiated with him and he got more rows than the other two companies but not quite as many as he had to start with. But it was a good learning experience. I learned a great deal in that grocery store.

**JE:** Did he have to continue giving you peanut clusters to make this happen?

**HM:** No. I really was not into payola. I really seriously thought I was doing it right. But I learned why it was that he was selling more milk and I agreed with him. We also learned a lot about marketing. I was always in a fight with the guy in the meat department because my dairy products were always stored in the meat department and I would run specials and he would run specials. I had to store my products in there. It was a grocery store chain of six stores. And he wouldn’t even go to the manager of our store anymore, he went directly to the manager of the whole chain and said, “This guy that’s in this dairy department, I can’t work with him anymore. He has taken over my meat department.” I learned things like marketing. I think the margin might have been about 20 cents a pound. We would run a special for a limit of 5 pounds for a dollar and it was incredible how many people take five pounds. It was the regular price, but we would stack it in the aisle with a sign that read “Limit 5 pounds for \$1.” I was able to use these concepts later in life.

**JE:** So, the key word was “limit” of 5 pounds for \$1?

**HM:** Yes, there was a limit of 5 pounds for \$1.



**JE:** So this was in 1956 or 1957 and you were 19 years old when you were learning these life lessons?

**HM:** That's right.

## Chapter 5 - 7:10

### The Floral Beginning

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**John Erling:** Where did you live?

**Herman Meinders:** When I was with the grocery store, I rented a room in a lady's house. She owned the flower shop, which came in handy later on. The manager of the grocery store where I worked had become a very close friend. He said, "Herman, you know we really need to go into business for ourselves." I said, "I agree with you. I think this will work. What are we going to do? I don't have any money?" So we finally decided that if we could get a little restaurant because I could cook. We wound up finding a bar that was going to cost \$3,000 to purchase. We could take it over between Christmas and New Year's. We wanted the New Year's business. My share of the \$3,000 was \$1,500. So I called my father and I told him that I wanted to buy this bar with this other gentleman. I told him that I had done a lot of research. I told him how many draws we could get out of a keg. It depended on whether we used a 10-ounce glass or a 9-ounce glass. We were going to serve hamburgers and I told him how many we would be able to get out of a pound of meat. We would put so many crackers in with it to give it some filler. We had it all worked out to the nth degree. I will never forget that my father said, "I'll loan you the \$1,500-but you make sure you are not using this to go to school. I believe in the bar." He owned a building in downtown Pipestone and one of his tenants was a bar and he always paid his rent on time. So my father knew that was a good business. So we bought the bar and we were in business January 1st.

**JE:** How does that work?

**HM:** The bar business was a little different than JC Penney company. We had different clientele. We were not in the best end of town you might say. Also, we were counting on customers coming down from the north in wintertime.

**JE:** I would like to remind everybody that this was in Tampa where this was happening.

**HM:** That's right. The people from the north were supposed to be coming down but it was the coldest winter in 60 years for Tampa, Florida. The customers from the north didn't come down. We just weren't making it. So I started looking for another job. I tried to sell pots

and pans, but that wasn't for me. I just couldn't come up with anything that would work out. One Saturday night, a gentleman by the name of Dale Murphy came out to the bar. He had a suit coat on. No one had ever been in Sammy's Bar with a suit coat on before. He wanted to shoot some shuffleboard and he wanted to play some skilled pool. There were quite a few customers that wanted to do this. I said, "No, I think I will shoot with him." So we shot shuffleboard quite a bit and he set up the house with drinks. We played some skilled pool. Then he wanted to cash a check. I said, "I'm sorry, we don't cash checks here." He had had maybe a few drinks, so he pulled out a large wallet and he had 30 or 40 checks in it. The checks fell on top of the bar and behind the bar and in front of the bar. But the one check I picked up first was from my landlady who was a florist. It was for \$15. I said, "I will cash this check." So as a result of that, we started talking about what he was doing. He had already mentioned that he was on the road selling directories to flower shops. So I said, "I think I would like to do that." He said, "It's a lot of traveling." I was 20 years old. I really wasn't old enough to be in the bar, let alone own it. I said, "I would be glad to travel." He said, "I am looking for a salesman. I am supposed to be in charge of everything east of the Mississippi. I will come back." I told him we were closed on Sundays. He said, "We are close on Sundays but I will meet you here in the morning." He said, "Fine." He never did show up. I don't think he had really remembered where he had been when he left. But I had the check and I had the name of the company that he worked for.

**JE:** What was the name of the company?

**HM:** It was called National Florist Directory located in Leachville, Arkansas. I called the company and told them that Dale Murphy was interested in hiring me and that I wanted to visit with him. The lady told me that she would have him call me. Well, three or four days go by and he doesn't call me. I kept calling and finally she tells her husband, Mr. Kenneth Short, who was the owner of the business. He was actually in Indianapolis, Indiana at the time. She told her husband to call me because she didn't want to talk to me anymore. She said, "Either give him a job, or not, but tell him to quit calling." So he called me and that's how I wound up going to work for National Florist Directory—it was through a telephone call from Indianapolis.

**JE:** Yeah, but you had tenacity and you kept after them.

**HM:** That's right.

**JE:** So you were on your way to Indianapolis. Do you have some money?

**HM:** My partner and I had made arrangements that he would pay me back eventually, but we both knew that there was no money in the company at that time. So I took \$15 from the bar business, which was agreed on. We also pawned a lot of watches and tools. I took five watches and left for Indianapolis, Indiana to meet Dale Murphy and start working for

him. One of the patrons of the bar wanted to get back to Ohio. He convinced me that if he could ride along and go about 50 miles out of my way, that once we got there his wife would give me enough money to get to Indianapolis. With \$15 we didn't think could make it. So we got to Lake City, Florida and a Sheriff pulls me over. I had to pull my wallet out. He took my wallet and took the money out of my wallet. He said, "Now son, just don't speed anymore." So I called the bar collect and convinced them to wire \$10 to me to a little town in Georgia. We picked up the \$10 and I dropped off the man who was traveling with me in Ohio. We arrived at his house at 7am and he told me his wife didn't get up until 8am. It was cold. We waited in the car until 8am. Then we went up to the house. It was a large house, one of the biggest ones in town. I knock on the door and she comes to the door and she said, "I told you I never wanted to see you again." She slams the door and he picks up his suitcase and he said, "You know, I think she is still mad at me." I said, "What are we going to do? You told me she would give me \$4 and I would have food and could take a bath and then I could be on my way." He said, "I have no idea." He starts walking across the lawn and I go back to the door and knock on it. The lady comes back to the door and I said, "I know you are mad at him, but here's my situation. I have got to get to Indianapolis. I have a job there but I don't have any money and I don't have any gas. He told me I could get a breakfast and the money to get to Indianapolis." She looked at me and I guess I looked pretty pathetic. She said, "Well, come on in." She gave me the best breakfast I had ever had in my life and gave me the \$4 so I could get to Indianapolis.

## Chapter 6 - 7:20

### Florist Directory

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**John Erling:** Tell us about the National Florist Directory.

**Herman Meinders:** The purpose of the directory was to help transfer orders from one part of the country to the other. There were three companies that helped send flowers from one part of the United States to the other. There was FTD, TDS and National Florist Directory. National Florist Directory started in 1956 and it was two years old. Everyone had heard of FTD. Let's say I had a sister that was ill in the hospital in Chicago and I wanted to send flowers to her. The florist would take the order and she would look in an FTD Directory, call the shop in Chicago and say, "I have an FTD order." It might be for \$10 or \$15 dollars back in those days. The florist in Chicago would fill the order. TDS worked the same way. They would look in the TDS directory and call a TDS member. National

Florist Directory listed every florist whether they bought the directory or not. We would list them with their name, address and phone number. So if we sold a directory to a shop that was located in east Tennessee and a customer walked in and wanted to send flowers to Chicago, the florist would find the name in the National Florist Directory, call in the order to Chicago and then the florist in Chicago would send the bill to the florist in Memphis. Then the Memphis florist would send the Chicago florist a check. It was all on the honor system. Back in those days, the honor system really did work pretty well. So you didn't have the expense of belonging to a wire service or paying monthly dues. They would just buy our directory once a year, which was \$15. We also sold advertising in the directory. So my job was to travel around calling on flower shops to sell the directory and/or sell advertising.

**JE:** FTD was the first company in this type of business—is that true?

**HM:** Yes, to my knowledge. FTD was the first company to do this. They are over 100 years old. TDS came along I think in 1932 or 1933. Then National Florist Directory started in 1956.

**JE:** Who founded NFD?

**HM:** Mr. Kenneth Short founded National Florist Directory. He had been selling directories to mortuaries. If somebody passed away and they wanted to ship the body back home, he could look in the directory and find the name of the funeral home and correspond with that funeral director. So while he was on the road selling National Funeral Directory, his wife was working in a flower shop. She said, "You know, they send a lot more flowers than we do bodies. We really need a national florist directory." So while he was selling the funeral directories, he was collecting data for the florist directory. He would get yellow pages out of phone books while he was traveling. He also had copies of the FTD directory and TDS directory. So when he started his directory he just printed it with these names and phone numbers. Then he hired a salesman and went around and started to sell them. I sold the first National Florist Directory in quite a few states. The way we would do it is to walk in and say, "I'm here to renew your listing with the National Florist Directory." They would say, "What are you talking about?" We would show them their name in the book and ask them if they wanted to continue to be listed. They would either say yes or say no and we would try to sell them an ad.

**JE:** You would ask them if they wanted to renew and they would ask what are you talking about?

**HM:** Right. Well, they had never seen the directory. The way that Mr. Short started it is he took all of the FTD listings, and all of the TDS listings and all of the yellow pages that he had accumulated together and he put a few dummy ads in there and printed this directory. Up until that time, nobody had ever seen that directory. Then we went off trying to sell the directories. Prime customers were ones that did not belong to FTD

or TDS. It gave them the name of a flower shop in Steamboat Springs, Colorado or wherever it was. We sold a lot of directories because it was needed. We put dummy ads in the directory just to get people when we would go back the next year. This was an annual affair. We would ask them if they wanted to renew their ad. When we put the dummy ads in a large town they received quite a few orders. They would say, "You know, people called in and said we were listed in the National Florist Directory. I didn't know what it was. I am glad to buy one." We had 13 salesmen selling them in the United States. My territory, since I was single, I could go wherever they wanted me to go. I started selling March 5, 1958 and I was on the road full-time until I became sales manager of Florafax in 1967.

**JE:** So you were on the road about 9 years?

**HM:** Yes. I called on every flower shop in 35 states. I did work at one time or another in all 50 states and half of the provinces in Canada.

**JE:** You were about 26 or 27 years old then?

**HM:** That's right. It was easy to travel then. I could get home about 2 weeks out of the year. I was in a different motel almost every night.

**JE:** Did you enjoy it?

**HM:** Well, I enjoyed it at first, but then it got a little old, but the money was good.

**JE:** What kind of money were you making?

**HM:** The first year I think my income was around \$7,000, which was not much when you had to pay all of your expenses. There were times when I actually did not have any money. I wasn't a very good salesman at that time. But I learned quickly and in the last years I was making about \$48,000 or \$50,000. Back in 1967 that was a lot of money. That was very good.

**JE:** What kind of cars did you drive?

**HM:** My first car was a 1949 Studebaker without a spare tire. From that car I went to a 1953 Ford. Then my first new car that I bought was a 1959 Ford. It was within a year and a half after I started that I had a new car.

**JE:** What kind of mileage would you put on these new cars?

**HM:** Over the 9 years that I was full-time with the National Florist Directory or Florafax, I averaged 88,000 miles a year. When I bought my new car, my sales immediately went up 25 percent. When I would pull up in front of a shop with a new '59 Ford, people thought more of me. When you dress successfully you are successful in their eyes and my sales went up at minimum 25 percent. Then I decided I wanted a heavier car and I bought a Cadillac. I was worried that florists may not like it, but my sales went up again. People like doing business with successful people. I wound up trading that car for a car in Hobbs, New Mexico. I thought I had made a great deal because I had gone to 10

dealerships all over the country trying to trade it. He obviously thought he made a good deal because after that I would just call them in Hobbs, New Mexico and tell them, "This is the condition of my car, the tires are bad and the window is broken but everything else is perfect." I took good care of my cars, so we just traded on the phone every year I think for five or six years.

## Chapter 7 - 9:14

### First Directory

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**John Erling:** You were selling a really simple concept. You said that you improved in your salesmanship. What was it that made you better?

**Herman Meinders:** When I was being trained, I trained for two days. We called on this shop in a small town in Indiana. A lot of the shops back then had greenhouses connected to the flower shop. The owner of the flower shop was in the back of the greenhouse watering plants when we went into the shop to sell. So we walked to the back of the greenhouse and talked to the man. He said that yes, he would buy a directory and an ad. On the way back through the greenhouse, it really looked dark like there was going to be a storm. So I started talking about the storm and the fact that it might hail. I mentioned that hail would really give that greenhouse glass a hard time. I basically got the guy worried enough that he dropped the ad, but he bought the directory from me. So I learned the things to not talk about, which is pretty basic, but it takes a few times to learn it. You learn to talk about positive things to talk about. Some of the shops I called on four or five or six years in a row. If I ever called on a shop one time, they always renewed for me. I didn't lie to people and I built up a great trust with my customers.

**JE:** You had a likeable personality that you were born with. You must have had a salesman's charisma of some sort. They liked you. You have to be liked in order to sell something, right?

**HM:** That's correct. I know when I was at Penney's and the farmers would come in, they all asked for me to be their salesman, which helped me with commissions. So you learn to build a personality.

**JE:** Right. I imagine you also remembered names?

**HM:** I kept a card on every shop I called on and put down the date I called on them. I would get as much information on their family as I could, because family is always the number one thing to talk about besides business. So I had this information on this card and

I would add to it every year. The other salesmen did the same thing. If someone was going to travel my territory and I had sold to them the year before, I would give them my cards and they would also give me their cards. The card system worked well.

**JE:** So Ken Short-

**HM:** Started National Florist Directory and he also started Florafax. The reason for it is if you remember, FTD gave guaranteed payment. TDS gave guaranteed payment. The National Florist Directory was not guaranteed payment. Also, they had to send a statement to the florist and the florist would have to mail a check. People wanted guaranteed payment with a clearinghouse where they would only have to send one check a month. So he started Florafax, which is just basically another wire service. He had a new concept. He had had a windshield replaced in his car that was insured. When he went to the auto glass shop, he drew a check on an insurance company. So the auto glass company was paid immediately. So he looked into it and worked with the banks and found out that if an order was placed in Memphis, Tennessee and it was going to go to Birmingham, Alabama, the shop in Birmingham, Alabama could fill out a draft on Florafax in Leachville, Arkansas and receive immediate payment. Not only that, they could list five orders with their shop's code numbers on that one draft and get immediate payment. That was a start for Florafax that was unique because everyone else had to send a report into headquarters, then the wire service would run it through their computer and send the bill for the balance when it was balanced out. They would balance the incoming and outgoing orders.

**JE:** You joined Florafax?

**HM:** Since Richard Short owned both National Florist Directory and Florafax, he let a couple of us sell both. In other words, when I called on the shop I would sell them the directory and then I would also offer them Florafax. I explained that Florafax would give them guaranteed payment. They would ask why they needed NFD if they got Florafax. I would explain that there were still a lot of people that only used NFD and I never gave high pressure. It was whichever one they wanted. I sold both. A lot of the NFD salesmen didn't want to take the time to try and sell Florafax. So as a result, there were only two or three of us that sold both. So I learned the Florafax way of doing business also.

**JE:** While you were on the road as a single man, it was hard for you to date anyone, wasn't it?

**HM:** It really was. I came back to Oklahoma City quite a bit because I really learned to love Oklahoma City. I would visit my fraternity brothers. While I was in school, I built a better relationship with my fraternity and my brothers than I did with Oklahoma City University. The reason I came back to Oklahoma City University was because of the fraternity. When I would visit, we would usually go out and they would fix me up on a date. I learned to spend a lot more time in Oklahoma City than in most places. That's where I dated and wound up marrying my first wife.

**JE:** What was her name?

**HM:** Judy Flaherty. We were married August 16th, 1963. I was still on the road traveling, so she would travel with me a little bit. In fact, when I worked Wyoming, Montana and Idaho, we would rent an apartment in Denver and I would work those areas out in Denver. We had our first daughter there on March 31st, 1966. So my wife stayed home more and I started to want to really settle down more. I talked to Mr. Short about it. He suggested that I become sales manager of Florafax. So in 1967 I became sales manager of Florafax. We moved to Leachville, Arkansas where my wife could be with me. I still did a great deal of traveling but I at least had a beautiful home with my wife.

**JE:** You bought a house?

**HM:** We bought a house. It happened to be the largest house in Leachville, Arkansas, which isn't saying much in a town of 1,500 people. It was a beautiful home with a lot of fruit trees.

**JE:** Actually, didn't you take a pay cut when you traveled less and settled down?

**HM:** I took a big pay cut. It dropped my pay about \$10,000 or \$11,000. They still paid my expenses, but it was a lot less income for me. In fact, after the first year I had to quit to get a pay raise. They finally gave me a \$1,000 pay raise and a \$1,000 bonus, which still upset me a great deal, but the pay just wasn't there.

**JE:** But you continued on?

**HM:** In March 1970, Mr. Short sold Florafax to Dick Hughes in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Cecil Samara was part owner I believe for a small time. So it was under new ownership, but I continued on as sales manager.

**JE:** When Ken Short sold Florafax to these two gentlemen, how did that affect you?

**HM:** I was concerned. I was wondering if they were going to bring in a new sales manager. I didn't know what was going to happen. I worked for a while. Then I noticed that there was a gentleman I probably was training to be a replacement, but I didn't know for sure. I really wanted to do something on my own. I wanted to go into central buying, where I would buy product hard goods in bulk and sell them in a different way to retail florists and wholesalers. But I had this large home in Leachville, Arkansas. My friend Rex who helped with the sale became a good friend of mine. He came to me and said, "Herman, if you are going to be doing something on your own, you really need to look at selling this house. We have a bookkeeper coming in. He has the money to buy this house and you might want to sell it to him." So I did sell my house to him. We still had our home in Oklahoma City. It looked like the company would be moving to Tulsa, Oklahoma, which it did. I was still vice president of sales of Florafax. They would just as soon have me work out of Oklahoma with air connections being a sales manager rather than live in Leachville, Arkansas and drive 85 miles to get to an airport. So it worked



out better to be a sales manager based in Oklahoma City. One day a customer called and said, "I see where you are working in North Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin and South Dakota. When did you give up your job as sales manager?" I said, "I am still sales manager." He said, "The book says you are a regional rep." So I opened the directory and it says that I was a salesman in Minnesota and so forth. That happened on at 1:30pm on October 22nd, 1970. At about 1:32pm I decided that I was going to start my own wire service.

**JE:** Because they hadn't told you?

**HM:** They had not told me that I was demoted and that they had brought someone else on. So I gave my notice October 22nd, and my last day was November 7, 1970. My first directory for my new company came out in December 1970.

## Chapter 8 - 6:40

### American Floral Service

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**John Erling:** That was a pretty gutsy thing to do with a wife and a child. Did you have any money saved up by this time?

**Herman Meinders:** I had money saved up when I started, but by the time I was through I had to live off of some savings. I started my company December 7th, 1970. I had already incorporated it to be a company for selling products and goods to the floral industry. I already had the new name picked out and set up.

**JE:** What was the name?

**HM:** The name was American Floral Service.

**JE:** How did you come to choose that name?

**HM:** Having sold a lot of advertising, I learned that first position is the best position. American is a great word to have in a name and the letter A comes first. That's how we came up with the name American Floral Service.

**JE:** You were living then in Oklahoma City?

**HM:** Yes, on Classen Boulevard in the upstairs of a duplex. I owned the duplex and the garage apartment.

**JE:** So you did accumulate some money and have some saved?

**HM:** I accumulated some earlier, right.

**JE:** You weren't really all that nervous probably?

**HM:** Well, I had a place to live and I had income from my rental property. I had helped start

Florafax, The most important thing I learned at Florafax was what not to do, more so than what to do about starting a new floral wire service.

**JE:** For instance?

**HM:** Well, when Mr. Short started Florafax the customer was required to pay a year's dues ahead of time, which was \$120. When you wanted to renew it a year later, they had to come up with \$120 again. I learned to put my dues on a monthly basis of \$5 a month. Five dollars a month was a lot less than an annual payment. The second thing I learned is they sold advertising and the ads cost them \$15 or \$20 every month. I didn't have any advertising, so my \$5 fee was the only cost. They got in one or two orders, it would pay for the \$5. There really weren't very many times they would have to send me a check. I had a few big customers that would send a lot of orders, so a lot of florists received orders. The first four or five years I was in business I didn't even allow advertising in the directory. So it really built it up where everybody had a chance. Then later on I sold advertising.

**JE:** What made you think that another directory needed to be out there when FTD and TDS and Florafax were already out there with directories and you had already contributed to Florafax's national florist directory in a big way? Was there a need in the market that you saw?

**HM:** No. That was the first thing that all of the florists asked. Why do we need another wire service? My answer was that I have a better wire service. My service was less expensive. They had to pay Florafax 5% to send an order. They had to spend so much on every order they sent through FTD and TDS. My company did not charge a percentage for sending. So once you belonged for \$25 and you paid your \$5 a month fee that was it. I encouraged them to try my service. I explained that it was not that much money and it was a better service. Plus, I knew most of these people and I could call them up on the phone and sell it to them on the phone. I knew the shops and I knew the quality of the shops. That was another selling point is that I told people that ordering through me ensured a better quality flower shop. I had been in all of the shops and we didn't want to do business with florists that you would be ashamed to walk into their shop.

**JE:** So you didn't take just anybody?

**HM:** No.

**JE:** When you may have before?

**HM:** FTD had the better shops at that time. TDS had the next-best shops and then Florafax. They weren't bad shops, but there were some bad shops because it was harder to sell Florafax. It was through friendship, better quality and less expense—so that's what we sold in the beginning.

**JE:** So it was \$25 to join and then they paid \$5 a month?

**HM:** Right.

**JE:** The competition of course didn't like this new concept of no-charge sending did they?

**HM:** No, but they could tell I was just very small. Our first directory had 137 florists. Our directory had 19 pages and theirs were large books. I don't feel that they really thought much about us. There were other companies that had tried to start directories and they had gone out of business. They thought that I was just another one of those. So they didn't really pay any attention to us.

**JE:** But, you continued to grow?

**HM:** We continued growing and eventually the other wire services started to realize that they were going to have to go to no-charge sending, which was my big selling point. We didn't charge to send an order out. In fact, I would make sales calls to large shops and tell them that every time they would send an order out through another service they were spending 50 cents and you don't have to spend that if you order with us. I would take two quarters out of my pocket and I would throw them in the trashcan. They would say, "What did you do that for?" I would say, "I will tell you why I did that when you tell me why you send orders out through another service when you waste 50 cents every time." It got their attention, so the other services had to go to no-charge sending. Then we came up with a 2-percent discount on orders. We didn't charge them anything to send and we offered a 2-percent discount for sending an order through AFS. The florists didn't really understand the discounts, that's when we went to a 50-cent rebate and then to a \$1 rebate and then \$2 rebates. We had other promotions also.

**JE:** Was no-charge sending something that you thought was really going to click? Did you think it was a no-brainer? You knew you were introducing something that nobody had ever done before, so was there a moment in time where you thought that no-charge was it?

**HM:** Yes, when I was the vice president of sales of Florafax I tried to get them to go to no-charge sending. I ran all the numbers on it and I told them that we would be increasing our volume and that would help pay for the loss. They ran their numbers on it and they said, "Herman, there is no way this will work." So I had tried to get them to go to no-charge sending for a couple of years. I tried to get them to reduce the amount they charged, but I was not successful. So yes, I had given it a great deal of thought.

**Chapter 9 - 6:53****Growing Pains**

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**John Erling:** Soon then, you were actually operating out of this garage apartment and you outgrew that. You hired somebody I suppose to help you at the office?

**Herman Meinders:** My wife helped me in the beginning and then two ladies from Arkansas to come over, but they didn't like it here so they went back. We hired our first employee, Lucille Tudor and then we hired Paula Busey. We were in this garage apartment that I owned. We finally outgrew the space, so we rented a two-wheel dolly and moved our desks across the street to National Pioneer Insurance Company, who had some office space upstairs.

**JE:** Where was that located?

**HM:** The garage apartment where we started was at 4610 & 1/2 North Classen. We moved across the street to 4500 North Classen.

**JE:** So all the time you spent on the road was paying off because now you could pick up the phone and talk to these people. They knew you and you had called upon them numerous times. You had laid the groundwork for what you were about to do.

**HM:** That's right. I had no idea what I was doing, but it was certainly a blessing. When I was on the road all of the time it didn't seem all that great—but it certainly turned out to be more valuable than even the income I made at that time.

**JE:** It was worth more than your college education, which ultimately you didn't get.

**HM:** That's right. I kept saying I would wait until I had a good year and then I would go back to school, but I still haven't had that year. (Laughter)

**JE:** (Laughter) Along about this time you brought your brother into the business.

**HM:** Right. I had been in business a year or two and the accounting was getting to be a big deal. We are talking about large sums of money now. I convinced my brother to come down and help.

**JE:** What was his name?

**HM:** Robert H. Meinders. He was my youngest brother.

**JE:** He had been living in Pipestone?

**HM:** Yes, he was living in Pipestone and working for a CPA up there. I convinced him to come down and that was one of my better moves.

**JE:** Then, obviously the business takes off and really grows and you have to be pretty excited that this idea was really working for you.

**HM:** Well, we had growing pains the first year. At times we almost grew too fast. But my employees had great faith in me. One time I was going to a Society of American Florists

Convention up in Minneapolis, Minnesota. I had made arrangements with the bank that if I had overdrafts up to \$5,000 that they would not send the checks back. They honored that. They would just send me a notice that I was overdrawn. This was before my brother Bob came onboard. The two ladies who worked for me, Lucille Tudor and Anne Trescott came up with about \$5,000 to give to the bank to make sure that those drafts didn't go back. I've really felt indebted to those two ladies. Because even though I was covered anyway, to have that much loyalty and belief in me was really reassuring.

**JE:** So you moved so fast that you were put into a financial bind?

**HM:** First we decided that one of the easy ways to handle this was to raise our monthly dues. So we raised it from \$5 to \$6. My brother and I worked on that. We were worried that we might lose some business, but nobody ever said a word. The next time we had problems, we raised the monthly fee to \$10. My brother Bob and I worried for just about five minutes. We didn't give it much thought. We knew that it would work okay. But finally, we reached a point one year where we didn't have the money to print the directory. The directories were coming out once a month at that time. We didn't know what we were going to do. So I decided that we would issue the directory and put June-July on it and have it be good for two months. So we did that. We figured the competition would really be hammering us and telling everyone that we were going out of business because we did not print it monthly. The calls came in, but it was because the florists were happy. They were so glad that we didn't put out a new directory every month. First of all, it looked like a waste of money. Also they would mark down their favorite florists in their directory when it came in. Now they did not have to do that every month, just every other month. So at the time when we were out of money and we thought it would put us out of business—it turned out to be a great blessing. So we never did come out with another monthly directory. Later we issued the directory every three months. They had to have a directory more often than once a year because we were guaranteeing payment for everybody in that directory. Not only that, but when we had new shops we wanted to get them into the directory so they could receive orders. The quarterly directory worked, but that was much later on.

**JE:** Did you have to go to a bank and take out a loan or did you do this on your own?

**HM:** When I first started I was banking at Citizens Bank. I talked to the bank and told them that I needed to borrow some money. They asked what I had for collateral. By then I already had all of my property used as collateral, so I offered to my wife's wedding ring as collateral. The banker told me, "I am going to tell you son right now—don't you ever do that again. That's the one thing that's sacred." I never did that again. But yes, we had different times when we needed money.

**JE:** What kind of money?

**HM:** I think it was around \$1,000.

**JE:** Did they ever give you that loan?

**HM:** Yes.

**JE:** Later on, you probably needed a larger sum of money?

**HM:** Later on we went to accounts receivable financing and I think it was Commercial Credit that we dealt with. They used our account receivable to loan money.

**JE:** There was a point where you actually asked for \$75,000. That's right. Before we did the accounts receivable we tried to do a small business loan. I went to a bank to try and get an SBA loan. We were not a minority and we were not female and they simply would not loan us the money. They were not loaning to people like me at that time.

**JE:** So you were turned down, but you did find a bank, Founders Bank?

**HM:** Right. We were turned down for the SBA Loan. At this time I think we were dealing with Guaranty Bank. Mr. Rose worked with us.

**JE:** And you got your \$75,000, which was really crucial for you to get that at the time.

**HM:** Yes, at the time it was life or death.

**JE:** Did you have sleepless nights because of some of these issues hanging over your head?

**HM:** (Laughter) Really I just took them in stride I guess. I was so tired. I worked long days, so when I did go to bed I slept. (Chuckle)

## Chapter 10 - 7:27

### Goliath Watching

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**John Erling:** Then you introduced a program called Infocom.

**Herman Meinders:** Infocom was the way you sent orders from one shop to another by a Telex machine. Western Union originally was the one that sent a lot of orders. When florists needed to send an order, they sent a Western Union from one shop to another shop. Actually, FTD stood for Florist Telegraph Delivery. Then telephones became more popular. We had it set up so they could have a terminal in their shop that was like a Telex machine that they had at Western Unions. A florist would put the order on that and send it to another one of our shops on Telex so they would know who had another machine like that. The Telex machines were really big and were becoming obsolete. So we dealt with Western Union and we had what we called the Infocom. It would go through their computers and it would be sent directly to another shop that was on this network. It was a forerunner to the Internet. It was a little ahead of its time. The machines were not as

reliable as we needed them to be, so we closed the Infocom network and started another network for sending orders that used computers—that was hosted by General Electric.

**JE:** Did your competition use the same Infocom system that you did? Or were you the only one that started using that?

**HM:** FTD started a network later. I can't recall the name of it now. We tried another network, which I think was called Americon. It was just a little ahead of our time. The florists didn't want to use it. It later became very popular. People now use terminals to send orders all of the time, but we were just ahead of our time.

**JE:** In 1980 you introduced a 50-cent rebate?

**HM:** That's right. I referred to that a little earlier. Every time they would send an order, they would receive a 50-cent rebate as long as their account was current (paid up). Then later we increased that rebate to a \$1 rebate. We also had promotions at that time. If they sent \$1,500 worth of orders through us in a 3-month period, we would give them an ice cream machine. There was a savings and loan that went out of business and it had a lot of electric ice cream makers and also hand-crank ice cream machines. We came out with a promotion that if you sent \$1,500 in orders in three months, we would send you a hand-crank ice cream maker. If you sent out \$3,000 worth of orders in three months, we would give you an electric one. Those promotions were unbelievable. Later we had sets of luggage. If you sent \$200 of orders in a month we would give to you a 4-piece set of luggage. We had so many customers. I mean they would just give us all of their orders for that period of time, which in turn, they could receive more orders and start sending more orders. It fed on itself.

**JE:** Did you ever hear from FTD or TDS? You had signed up about 5,000 florists probably by this time?

**HM:** We had signed up 1,000 a year.

**JE:** So maybe you had 5,000 signed up?

**HM:** Right.

**JE:** They were in the 20,000 range I suppose?

**HM:** 15,000 to 20,000 range, yes.

**JE:** So you still were new but you were growing. Did you get any sense that they were looking at you? That they knew about you?

**HM:** That's when they copied us. When we were in business five years, FTD came out with no-charge sending, and reduced clearinghouse charges. It took them 5 years to do it. They were introducing it like it was the first time that it had ever happened, but we were doing it five years earlier. So they started competing with us after five years on no-charge sending. That's when we went to discounts and then we went to rebates with the luggage and ice cream makers and TVs and whatever else.

**JE:** But when you saw that, you knew you were on to something big. It looks like somebody has written something at the top of this book.

**HM:** I put at the top of the directory, the October/November FTD directory. "Always keep this copy." Because it was a big day to me when that directory came out because they had to tell everyone that no-charge sending was here.

**JE:** This giant, this Goliath they were beginning to weaken and had give in to what you had done?

**HM:** There is no question. They knew we were on the block.

**JE:** You introduced a toll-free 800-phone number?

**HM:** That's right. We really pushed 800 numbers so that would communicate with us. We originally moved to Oklahoma City when I started my business, I could have started it anywhere. I had worked in all 50 states. But I felt the people in Oklahoma really did the best job. We would be calling on the florists one on one somewhat. But we also would be dealing with them on the phone. I just felt that the Oklahoma people were much friendlier and warmer people. I enjoyed dealing with people from Oklahoma more than anywhere else.

**JE:** You moved into and bought a huge, 12,000-square-foot office building?

**HM:** That was in 1976 I believe.

**JE:** That's when you expanded services into Mexico and Canada?

**HM:** Yes. Once we had more space we started to grow at a faster speed. We moved into Canada first and then Mexico. I had had relations with some shops in Mexico when I had been with Florafax, so it was just a matter of renewing that. We had the best connections in Mexico than any other service.

**JE:** You were having fun now weren't you?

**HM:** It was more fun that you could ever believe. Every day it seemed to be getting better. I know my brother and I talked about it quite often. We just couldn't believe it was going this fast. Then actually, in 1982 we decided that we needed more space. That's when we built the first building specifically for AFS as a wire service.

**JE:** How big was that building?

**HM:** That was a 45,000-square-foot building, which was completed in 1982. Sometimes we would get a little impatient. Our builder was going to have the building ready on September 30th. We were going to move into the new building on September 30th of 1982. The builder had it almost ready, but they were messing around. They didn't have the carpet down and they didn't have some of the painting done. I told them we were going to move in and they didn't have it ready September 30th. I told them, "We are going to move in October 10th whether you are ready or not." October 10th we hired a moving company. All they had to do was move us across the alley. On one day we moved in and



some of the desks were on concrete floors and some of the offices weren't painted. When the contractor showed up Monday morning he was shocked to see we were doing business in that building. I said, "I kept my word. I told you I was moving in October 10th." The next weekend they got it wrapped up, but we did move forward.

**JE:** Yes. While all of that was going so well, then in your personal life, your first marriage ends in divorce?

**HM:** That's right. Judy did a great job and was a very hard worker, but the company couldn't have two bosses. She helped start it, but I had to take the office alone and I think that's what hurt us. I was working 18 hours a day. I'd have to take the responsibility for that divorce because I just was not a husband when I was working.

**JE:** Then you remarried?

**HM:** Yes.

**JE:** Whom did you marry?

**HM:** Jodie Boren.

## Chapter 11 - 5:22

### False Accusations

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**John Erling:** Then you introduced something to the business where you held your first international convention on a cruise ship.

**Herman Meinders:** That's right. The floral industry likes to have conventions, or they did at that time. FTD likes to have huge conventions. They would have a few thousand people attend. TDS likes to have conventions and they would have 1,200 or 1,500 people show up. I was thinking that they were expensive to put on and I just didn't know how many people would show up. Everybody would always compare us with how many attendees FTD had. Or they would compare us to TDS, who had half as many attendees as FTD. So people might think they were half as good or whatever. I decided that we would have a convention on a cruise ship. Number one, we would get a free cabin for every 10 we sold, so it didn't cost us any money for our personnel to attend. Also, people never complain about the food on a cruise ship, or the accommodations. We had a three-hour meeting on the entire cruise, which always lasted a week. So when our florists went home, they had attended a three-hour meeting and they were happy. They would say it was the best convention they had ever been to. So we never had the largest ones up until that time, but we had the best ones. Everyone enjoyed them. There was always a lot of talk about

it. Wholesalers knew their customers were on a cruise and the word just got out.

**JE:** As much fun as you were having, there was a knock on the door in the fall of 1979. Tell us what that was all about.

**HM:** Well, I was in the process of a divorce from Jodie Boren. The police came to the door and wanted to know where I had been. I told them that I was at home in bed. They said, "Where's your car?" I had loaned one of my cars to a salesman that was in town, so I had a different vehicle. They wanted me to come to the police station. I said, "What's this all about?" They said, "Never mind, you just get dressed." There was a lady police officer there. She was watching me get dressed, which upset me a little. They went through my underwear and my clothes and took my clothing. This was a very small kitchenette where I was living at that time. They put me in the car to take me to the police station. On the way, they stopped another police car and they said, "We found him." They took me to the station on Hefner Parkway now. They told me I was accused of molesting my daughter.

**JE:** You were probably already asking what they were arresting you for on the outset?

**HM:** I was asking them what they wanted and they just didn't tell me anything right away at the beginning. I had no idea what they were talking about. So they took me downtown. I am going to tell you right now that the police are not always on their best behavior. They had already decided that I was guilty. When they frisked me they pounded me on the chest. They hit me and it was just not pretty. They took me to a large cell where there were a lot of people, mostly drunks. I watched them bring an Indian man in and they just kept beating on him and he was just a happy drunk. It was just crazy what was going on. I will always remember that day.

**JE:** Then the shock of being charged with molesting your daughter?

**HM:** My daughter was born in 1977 so I think she was less than one year old.

**JE:** What was her name?

**HM:** Christine Marie. I remember this was about 10 or 11 o'clock at night and I couldn't talk to anybody until the next morning. I talked to my lawyer and I said I would take a polygraph or whatever. I told him, "I haven't done anything." So I took a polygraph and they went through everything of mine and finally they released me.

**JE:** How long were you in jail?

**HM:** I think I got out around noon the next day. My brother Bob came to pick me up. You feel so low, You know, I hadn't done a thing but I couldn't face anybody. I couldn't face my employees. I hadn't done anything. They didn't even know what was going on, but it was the worst day of my life.

**JE:** Yes. So who had filed this charge that you had molested your daughter?

**HM:** Well, her mother, Jodie Boren had gone to the Police and said that her daughter had

been molested. I took the polygraph and that was it. I tried to get her to take a polygraph with the police but they wouldn't do that. Thank God I had a good lawyer.

**JE:** Did the newspapers get a hold of this?

**HM:** No, it wasn't in the newspaper. But I told them if they were not going to expunge it from my record I was going to buy a full-page ad in the newspaper. I was so upset about it and I hadn't done anything and I wanted that out in the open. So they finally took it off of my record.

**JE:** So then you were divorced from Jodie Boren after that?

**HM:** That's right. Judge Weir was the judge that handled the divorce. He was a great gentleman.

**JE:** Did you ever have words with her about this?

**HM:** No, not really. I had to go to counseling. That was part of it before they would release everything. The counselors were great. There was no problem.

**JE:** What a horrible experience.

## Chapter 12 - 5:12

### Only Three Ads

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**John Erling:** Moving along, in 1980 you had another international cruise on the Queen Elizabeth II?

**Herman Meinders:** Yes, the QE2 to England.

**JE:** Yes.

**HM:** It was a great trip. Then later, about our conventions, we could no longer write them off (as a business expense) if they were foreign registered ships. So later we had our conventions like in Germany on the Rhine River. We would take over an entire boat and cruise the Rhine River. Then later we had to have two boats because we had so many people attending.

**JE:** That had to be something for you. Here you were coming back to Germany where roots were and where your family was from.

**HM:** That's right.

**JE:** Here you are with this successful company going down the Rhine.

**HM:** I enjoyed visiting with relatives. I like to go back and visit with them. A little of the Low German was with me when I had a beer or two.

**JE:** Then you introduced this concept to your business that you learned in selling margarine.

You told the florists the same as you told people who were going to buy margarine. You told them, "You can only buy five ads."

**HM:** This was during a time of unbelievable growth. We had 1,000 new shops a year in average growth. We always kept information if we didn't sell them ads as to whether or not they were a desirable shop. If they were a desirable shop, we kept info on whether or not they were credit worthy and were they quality shops. So if they fell in all three of those categories, we wanted them as customers. We compiled this list and we ended up with 12,000 florists' addresses and names. We mailed them a kit, which included our directory, our professional floral design magazine, which was the best in the industry and a couple of other items. We mailed 12,000 kits out. Our kit was a big box with a lot of information in it. Then we brought all of our salesmen in. I think we had about 30 salesmen. We went down to the Cox Convention Center, or whatever the convention center was named then and put in 30 some WATS lines. For two weeks we were on the phone calling all of these shops. During that sales blitz we would also give them an ad for three months free of charge. We would tell them that the maximum they could have was three ads free. They would say that they service this town and this town and we would like to have five ads. The salesman would call me over and he would say, "Herman, this shop would like to have five ads." I would say, "Okay, but they have to be sure they use us." So when we told them that they could only have three ads, they all wanted to fudge and get a couple of more ads. So sometimes we would sell seven or eight ads because that was the name of the game. The more ads we would have the more business we would have, so they got free ads first, but we kept most of them. Out of those 12,000 shops, we sold 3,300 in two weeks, which was just unbelievable. Those shops were all excited about getting into our new service. We gave them a special rebate. We went from 12,000 shops to 15,000 shops in a matter of two weeks. The volume just doubled because the other shops that were getting orders from new florists were starting to send orders back to them. It was just an unbelievable growth.

**JE:** Another time for being giddy, wasn't it?

**HM:** It really was.

**JE:** Yes, so in 16 years, according to my records here, AFS served 18,000 florists in 22,000 cities.

**HM:** That's correct.

**JE:** You realize your company was no longer a one-man show along about this time as well?

**HM:** That's right. I think it was about 1984 when we looked for a president. I talked to my brother Bob to see if he wanted to be president and he didn't want to. I started a search for a president. I had heard of a person named Tom Butler that had worked for FTD. He was really in line to be president of FTD, but they chose someone else. So he had gone

to work for a hard goods company in Kokomo, Indiana in syndicate sales. A friend of mine came in and we were talking after a design show. I told him I was really looking for a president for AFS. He said, "Why don't you get Tom Butler?" I told him, "I had not really thought of him because he had left FTD and gone into syndicate sales." He said, "I think he would do it." So we called him that night and I think Tom came in to talk to us one or two days later for an interview. We hired him and Tom started as president. As he likes to say, I wanted a promotion and I finally got to be promoted to chairman.

**JE:** Did he stay on with you?

**HM:** He was hired to be kind of an assistant. He was with me about six months when I made him president. He still is connected. He was president all of the time. When I sold the company in 1994, he continued on as president of AFS and then when they merged with Teleflora in 2000, he is chairman I believe.

## Chapter 13 - 3:11

### Herman Meets LaDonna

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**John Erling:** So you had been divorced, but some time in 1985 you met a lady by the name of LaDonna. Tell us about her.

**Herman Meinders:** Well, LaDonna worked for Oklahoma City University. I was close to my fraternity brothers and one of them, Jim Whitaker, worked for OCU as well. In fact, the way that we met, Jim Whitaker was in fundraising as well as in sports at OCU. He was talking to LaDonna and he said, "You know, Herman Meinders is in the floral industry and we need gardens around the art center. Why don't you contact him about giving money for the gardens?" LaDonna said, "Well, he's your friend. Why don't you talk to Herman about it?" He said, "We really need to talk to President Walker, and Walker and I don't get along. Can you go to President Walker and ask him to contact Herman Meinders?" She did that. Dr. Walker contacted me and invited me down for breakfast. At the breakfast was Rex Rudy, myself, Jim Whitaker, President Walker and LaDonna Gooden. It was the most expensive breakfast I ever had. We wound up funding the gardens for \$50,000. Then later on in the year they named me outstanding alum of the year. LaDonna was the Alumni Director. So she had to set the program up and we had a banquet. LaDonna has her story and I have my story. My story is that LaDonna changed place cards so that I would be sitting next to her. She thinks that I said, "Why don't you sit next to me?" That's probably the way that it went. But anyway, we sat by each other at the

banquet. I was single and she was single. We talked about Vic Damone who was coming to Oklahoma City as a fundraiser. So we went to that together and that's how it started. That was in December of 1985 and in May of 1986 we got married.

**JE:** She had built quite a resume for herself. She was Miss Oklahoma?

**HM:** Yes. She started out as Miss Maid of Cotton on the national level and then she was Miss Oklahoma. She also was a great pianist. She's done a lot of concerts playing piano. She has performed at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. So she's a very talented person and a very good person.

**JE:** She played classical music as her talent for the Miss America competition?

**HM:** That's correct.

**JE:** That probably wasn't all that accepted-classical music, by the judges—even though she was a good performer?

**HM:** Well, I never did see a review of it but I am sure she was the best one there.

**JE:** And she has authored some books?

**HM:** She is a great writer. She wrote her story about her life growing up. She now has two publications. One is *Angel Hugs* and one is *Angel Hugs for Cancer Survivors*.

**JE:** Was there cancer in your family?

**HM:** Yes, in our family. She has had cancer twice. But they have removed it all and that's been 10 years ago. So we are very blessed that that is behind us.

**JE:** Wow. So that was why she was married to you then?

**HM:** That's correct.

## Chapter 14 - 3:54

### Million Dollars

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**John Erling:** We have to talk about this. In 1984 you announced a \$1 million cash first prize. This was also something that the industry had never seen before. Tell us about that. What was that about?

**Herman Meinders:** We were really growing and people still wanted to all get together. Wholesalers and vendors all suggested that we have a convention. We weren't selling product, so the wholesalers loved us so did the retailers, so they convinced us to have a convention. We wanted it to be something very special. At that time McDonald's was giving away prizes with scratch off cards. Rex Rudy came up with the idea of something like a fish in a pond—where you buy an insurance policy and you give away \$25,000 if

they catch the fish. He was going to have some type of a deal like that where we would not really give away the million dollars. There would be the possibility of it, but not a big one. I told them that I didn't operate that way. If we say there's a chance to win a million dollars, there will be a million given. So we dealt with this company out of New York that was handling the McDonald's promotion. They came up with a puzzle promotion where there were 200 pieces in a puzzle. There was going to be one piece of the puzzle drawn in Las Vegas, Nevada on August 4th, 1987. That person would win the million dollars. They would receive \$50,000 for 20 years. So we started working on the promotion. The way it worked was that every time they sent five orders, they would receive a piece of the puzzle. That started in 1984, so this promotion went on for almost three years. But in those three years, not only was there a chance to win the million dollars later, but we also gave away hundreds of TVs and VCRs and microwaves and computers. We also gave away a lot of small prizes, like knives and other knick-knacks. There was a tremendous amount of excitement in the industry. People who had never really used us that much were sending us big orders. The big day came on August 4, 1987. There were 10 people that had the same piece of the puzzle that we had printed that would be the potential winner. We had a drawing and this lady from Picayune, Mississippi won the million dollars. It was the largest convention ever held in the floral industry. We had over 5,000 people attend. We had Rich Little as an entertainer as well as Mac Davis. We had to have two ballrooms for the entertainers because there was not a place big enough. It was an unbelievable convention.

**JE:** FTD and TDS were probably just scratching their head and looking at this upstart company.

**HM:** When we gave the million dollars there was no question because we'd had some hard times. They could tell you know, when we'd cut corners. But once we gave the million dollars they didn't have any more discussions about whether or not we were going to make it or if we were going to be around.

**JE:** Do you know the name of the lady who won the million dollars?

**HM:** The lady was Jimmie Jarrell. She was a poor shop. In fact, she didn't even stay at the convention hotel. It was their vacation and they were staying at a hotel down the street. They didn't have the money to stay at the convention site, so they could really use it. I know she was a strong Baptist I believe. When she got home her church got their 10 percent and every year they knew when she was getting that check.

**JE:** You paid her \$50,000 a year then until it was paid out?

**HM:** What we did was we bought an annuity in 1984. Interest was high at the time. We bought an annuity from an insurance company that would pay starting August 4th, \$50,000 a year for 20 years. I think it cost me about \$297,000 of actual money for the million dollars.

**JE:** That was money well spent.

**HM:** It really handled it.

**JE:** Yes.

## Chapter 15 - 2:12

### Paul Harvey

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**John Erling:** In time you went national with your advertising and you advertised with Paul Harvey?

**Herman Meinders:** Yes. Paul Harvey as you know started in Tulsa, Oklahoma. I remember being on the road and listening to Paul Harvey every day at noon because when I was traveling that was my news source. I always made sure I found the station with Paul Harvey.

**JE:** Especially that noon program.

**HM:** Yes, *Noon News*.

**JE:** Right.

**HM:** So when we had a convention in 1990 in Orlando, Florida, we had Paul Harvey as our spokesman and speaker. Paul did a great job in national advertising. Her certainly filled the bill for being a good, clean-cut ad man who got a lot of results.

**JE:** That paid off for you as well to have him advertise for you?

**HM:** That's right. I think it was around a \$1 million dollar a year advertising fee. I'm not sure. You never knew which one your spot would be on. You never knew if it would be on in the morning or noontime, or during *The Rest of the Story*, or on Saturday. They all had great listenership.

**JE:** Yes.

**HM:** He had four of the top five ABC programs.

**JE:** Then of course he spoke as a testimonial about your company. Did you brief him? Did he come out and see the facility? How did he get it into his copy or was it written for him?

**HM:** We helped him with some information. He had his copywriters but we sent him the copy most of the time. We also had him at our conventions to address our salesmen as a motivational speaker. In fact, one time he was coming one time to do our sales meeting and I convinced him to stop in Muskogee, Oklahoma and I picked him up in my helicopter and took him to my ranch. He got to go through the ranch and spent an afternoon there, which actually was the highlight of the year for him. At the end of the year his son does *The Best of Paul Harvey* and he said his favorite program was the one he did about Diamond H Ranch. We got to know him very well.



**JE:** How did you find him to be personally when you were around him?

**HM:** He was very uplifting. He was a very Christian person. He was very positive and he was in-tune to everything. I mean, he knew the news, but he really knew what was going on. He loved his wife Angel. She came with him.

**JE:** And you could see that love between them?

**HM:** You could sure see their affection for each other.

**JE:** It must have been great to hear that voice standing right next to you.

**HM:** That's right.

## Chapter 16 - 5:23

### AFS Is Sold

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**John Erling:** So then by 1993, you were closing in on FTD. You were just 2,000 florists behind FTD.

**Herman Meinders:** We actually passed FTD in 1993. In February of 1994, I believe we had about 25,000 subscribers, which was larger than any of the other services.

**JE:** Somewhere along in here, you began to think about selling the company?

**HM:** Yes. In the early 80s, my brother Bob and I at one time thought we might sell. We actually went to a meeting down in Texas where they talk to people about selling their company. It was a 2-day program on the things to do and the things to not do. I think it was put on by the Geneva Company. Part of it was that they would evaluate your company. We had them come up to evaluate our company. We thought their evaluation was way too low. We weren't really going to sell anyway, but it gave us some ideas of what to do because we were always looking ahead. So then on January 2, 1993, over the weekend I kind of thought it was time to sell. I walked into Bob's office and said, "I want to talk to you and then it." And he said, "Yeah, I want to talk to you too." So we both came up with the idea to sell on the same weekend. You know, this is really the time. After all of those years for us to decide that on the very same day-but it just looked like the right thing to do.

**JE:** Why was it the right thing to do at that time?

**HM:** We were doing very well. We had great managers in place. I had my replacement in place and Bob had his replacement in place. We just wanted to walk away. We wouldn't work very well for somebody else. It was the right time. Plus, there was getting to be more and more technology involved. Technology costs a lot of money to stay up with. To put computers in, we are talking about millions of dollars we had to invest. We were riding high. We had the best reputation. We had the best employees. We had the best customers. We were No. 1. We weren't in any big hurry, but we made the decision that

we were going to sell. So we got in touch with the Geneva Company. The person we had visited with before was no longer with them. We told them that we really seemed to get along with that person well and it was a personal thing. We asked if they knew where we could find him. They gave us the name of the company that he went to work for, which was a similar type of company. So we had him come out and we talked about it. We finally made the decision three or four months later that we were going to go with them. They had to put a book together—a prospectus. We had to give names of people who we thought might be interested and they had to get some. I think it was around August or September that we all agreed with the book and we sent it out. We received back 12 proposals, four of which we could have accepted. We interviewed those four and then we narrowed it down to one. We didn't take the one that would give us the most—we could have had quite a bit more. But we agreed that the company that would stay in Oklahoma City and keep all of our employees. We gave 15% of their salary for retirement. The company had to continue to do that for two years. They couldn't fire anybody for two years. We wanted to protect our employees and also keep the business in Oklahoma.

**JE:** How many employees did you have approximately?

**HM:** About 165. I was also involved with the Jefferson Bank & Trust in Lakewood, Colorado. The president of that bank, Mo (inaudible) helped us when we had to gather this information and put these books together in doing the negotiating. Then afterward, he helped us with due diligence. Mo was really a very sharp individual. I convinced him to come to Oklahoma City in September or October. He worked full-time with the people that bought the company to get the figures right.

**JE:** How old were you about this time?

**HM:** I sold in 1994, so I was 57 years old.

**JE:** Then, Chemical Ventures Partners purchased the company.

**HM:** That's right. They were out of New York.

**JE:** But then in the year 2000 they merged it didn't they with Teleflora?

**HM:** Chemical Bank bought the majority of AFS in February 1994. We retained 16% between my brother and our family. In 2000, Chemical decided that they were ready to sell the company and had it on the market. It wound up that it was a merger with Teleflora. Actually, Teleflora took it over and they took the rest of our stock at the same time.

**JE:** That must have been interesting for you because here you had been competing with Teleflora for all these years. Did you have some back-and-forth with those people?

**HM:** It was a lot of fun. They told me that when I sold in 1994—they had all of the figures when they bought the company—that in 1994 we were four times the size of Teleflora. But they did some acquisitions and when they emerged in 2000 they were about the same size.

We were a very strong, good company even still in 2000. But in 1994 we were really at our peak.

**JE:** They had many years of a head start on you too as a matter of fact.

**HM:** That's right.

## Chapter 17 - 5:30

### Meinders Foundation

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**John Erling:** Then you began to concentrate even more on funding charitable causes in our state. It's just interesting how life was meant to be. Because you spent a year here at Oklahoma City University, obviously that was strengthened because of LaDonna, you established scholarships here and you established the Oklahoma City University business school.

**Herman Meinders:** That's correct.

**JE:** Then in time, they named the school The Meinders School of Business?

**HM:** We started out at the other location. They called it the Meinders School of Business when we gave about \$2 million. Later, we were outgrowing it. I felt we needed a new facility. We looked at remodeling the old building, but we decided to build the new building. Over the years, I realized that there was a lot of property around Oklahoma City University that was really not very good. It had drug dealers and different things. We bought over 120 houses or individual lots around OCU. We had the property and that is why we built the building for the school of business.

**JE:** You donated the money for this building?

**HM:** We donated 100% of the land and the building and its furnishings.

**JE:** Which totaled \$18.5 million?

**HM:** That's correct.

**JE:** We are sitting in that building right now. Outside it's The Meinders School of Business building. It's built on property that you once lived in around here when you first came to Oklahoma City?

**HM:** Yes. When I came to Oklahoma City that first summer, I lived in one of those houses that we purchased and is no longer here.

**JE:** How about this building? Since it was your money were you into the day-to-day of building the building?

**HM:** I was here pretty much every day. It went pretty well. The contractor loved us because

when a decision had to be made we made it that day, not through any committees, which happens quite often. So we got the building in with what we thought it would cost and ahead of schedule. We couldn't have asked for more.

**JE:** What is housed here then?

**HM:** This is The Meinders School of Business and the entire business school is here.

**JE:** That means there are quite a few faculty and students in this building?

**HM:** Yes. We have a large undergraduate program and an even larger graduate program in the business school.

**JE:** Do you talk to them? Are you asked to speak to the classes?

**HM:** I did for a couple of years, I spoke to them for one day, but I am not comfortable with that, so I discontinued that.

**JE:** You have been very helpful to Habitat for Humanity. There's a long list here. You established The Meinders Foundation?

**HM:** When we sold the company we established The Meinders Foundation. I've given a great deal from that and we've done a great deal personally. The Meinders Foundation is almost running out of money—they give away too much.

**JE:** Also you needed to get away and get out into the countryside. Wasn't there a ranch that came about?

**HM:** My favorite place is the Diamond H Ranch in Cookson, Oklahoma. It's 6,600 acres of pastures and woodlands with a lot of wildlife, deer and turkey. It's very relaxing. It's the place to be.

**JE:** That's down in Cherokee and Sequoyah counties?

**HM:** Yes. It's in two counties.

**JE:** Are you giving parcels of the land to The Boy Scouts?

**HM:** We're giving it all to The Boy Scouts. We've given parts of it. I'll keep 240 acres until I pass away and my wife passes away and so long after that. Then they'll have that 240 as well. But they use all of it right now. We built them a building on the land that they have, a Welcome Center.

**JE:** Waite Phillips did that with his ranch in New Mexico.

**HM:** I've been on that ranch in New Mexico. He did it and I agree that young people need a place to be able to go. I think there can't be anything better than the outdoors to do a lot of hiking and mountain biking and canoeing and kayaking. It's so rewarding to get up in the morning and drive around on the ranch a little bit. You might see 30 or 40 Scout tents there and then you drive a little farther on you see another 20 or 30 tents. When you get 100 Scouts out there having a great time, fishing and whatever, it makes life worthwhile.

**JE:** On top of that, there are no milk cows on that ranch.

**HM:** (Chuckle) That's right. No milk cows, no pigs and no chickens. (Laughter)

**JE:** But you do run beef cattle?

**HM:** That's correct.

**JE:** Horses?

**HM:** We have two Mustang horses. We just enjoy them tremendously.

**JE:** While I have named all of these great institutions that you have contributed to, there must be some others?

**HM:** Besides the business school, the number one would be The Kramer School of Nursing. My wife's maiden name is Kramer. The first building we had was named in honor of her parents. Then we had to add a second one. We just did an expansion. The school has more than doubled in the last couple of years.

**JE:** The School of Nursing?

**HM:** Yes.

**JE:** Is that part of OCU?

**HM:** Yes, it's on the campus here at Oklahoma City University. It's right here. I couldn't build one without the other.

**JE:** That's just great. It's interesting too that that apartment that you rented in Tampa, Florida was owned by a florist.

**HM:** It was meant to be. What are the odds of that happening? I never would have cashed any other check but that one.

**JE:** But you had a business mind you were born with. There's no question about that. It just happened to be that this was it. It could have been something else.

**HM:** It could have been anything else.

**JE:** Whatever it took to be able to make money and be able to figure this whole thing out.

**HM:** I feel I would have been in business regardless.

**JE:** Right.

**HM:** Flowers were the last thing I thought I would be in. (Laughter)

**JE:** Well, it's been the best thing you could have done that's for sure.

**HM:** Yes it has.

## **Chapter 18 - 5:39**

### **Like What You Do!**

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**John Erling:** This is a pretty amazing story I could say from Pipestone, Minnesota to Oklahoma City, to the Cookson Hills of Oklahoma. Let's reflect on your life. What advice do you

have for students? All of these stories that I have recorded, they include hard work. Can you reflect on your life up until this point?

**Herman Meinders:** Well, we had loving parents. They taught me how to work. We were a Christian family. They had me very close to the church. In fact, while I was on the road traveling the Missouri Synod had programs on the television and on the radio.

**JE:** *The Lutheran Hour?*

**HM:** Yes, *The Lutheran Hour* I would listen to and it would keep me connected to my church. Those were good basic things to help me through life. I've just been very blessed. I think as far as advice, I would say pick your friends and have good friends and spend time with them.

**JE:** You enjoyed doing what you did. Isn't that a big component? They have to pick something that they enjoy?

**HM:** Yes, that's right. When I called on flower shops, which I did 50 weeks out of the year for years, I was surprised at how many times I called on the same shop time after time one of the older florists would say, "I am going to retire and my son is going to take over." I would go back the next year and the man had died. He kept working so long that he never had a chance to enjoy life. You need to enjoy life as you go along some. But more importantly, pick the job you like. So many of those fathers almost forced their kids, their sons or whatever to stay in the business. So when he passed away, the son might be 45 or 50 years old and he hated the job and hated what he was doing. A lot of them stayed in the business. I still see them, but I think it is so pathetic to go through life working at something you don't like. Even if it's inheriting a business, it's not worth it. All I can say is if you don't like what you are doing, for goodness sakes change it, because life's too short to be doing something you don't want to do. I was very fortunate that I always loved what I was doing. I put in long hours, but they were like nothing. I mean it was not like work at all. It still isn't work. When I go to the ranch, if I brush-hog, it's not really work because I love doing it. Anything I do I like doing.

**JE:** Speaking of children, how many children did you have?

**HM:** I have two children. My oldest daughter Kathryn passed away. My youngest one, Christine Marie lives in Los Angeles and last week we attended her graduation from getting her master's degree from Pepperdine. So we are very proud of her.

**JE:** So you didn't have children who were tempted to be in the floral business as you were?

**HM:** Yes, my oldest daughter wanted to be in the business and her ambition was to run the business. She did work for us for a while. But she really needed to be on her own for a period of time first, which she did do, because she was always the boss' daughter. She was a good, very smart employee, but she needed to make her own first and then be able to come back and she just didn't get back.

**JE:** You've been highly honored by the floral industry with numerous awards. You've been inducted into the Oklahoma Heritage Hall of Fame. You contributed to your home school district in Pipestone. Tell us about that.

**HM:** They needed a new school, but they were having a hard time passing the bond issue to get it done. They also wanted to move the public library in with the school so they could use the equipment and everything at the same location. My classmate who lives there asked me if we would help them. So we donated a little over a million dollars with the understanding that the bond issue would pass and that they would build a new building. I think it helped push that building to happen. It's a great facility and very up to date.

**JE:** It had to make you feel really good that you could come back there and contribute to the community that really sent you off in life?

**HM:** Absolutely. Yes. I had a great education there.

**JE:** So, how would you like to be remembered?

**HM:** That I always did the best I could.

**JE:** I can help you with that because you have built a stellar reputation. You are honest. You are a man of your word. If you made a promise, you followed through. You built tremendous trust among the florists and among your staff. So everything I just said is the way people will always remember you.

**HM:** Last summer we had a reunion with all of the employees, even though we sold the business in 1994. They were all welcome. I don't know how many hundred showed up from how many states. It was just a great time and way to remember my employees and for them to remember me. It was just a great time.

**JE:** Oklahoma is certainly fortunate to have you come down here. You escaped the harsh winters of Minnesota. I understand all of that myself. I love Oklahoma as well and the climate. The major contributions you've made to this state are enormous. I'm going to put myself in charge of speaking for the state right now and say thank you for what you've done and how you have represented this state.

**HM:** Well, thank you. The state has been good for me. As I tell everyone, I selected Oklahoma. I knew I would like the people here. I am here by choice. It was a great choice. It was the best choice I could have made. Oklahoma has been very good to me. Life has been very good to me. I thank everyone for it.

**Chapter 19 - 0:24****Conclusion**

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**Announcer:** The Founding Sponsors of VoicesofOklahoma.com thank you for listening to another Oklahoma success story-the story of Herman Meinders and American Floral Services. This interview should be shared with those who are planning to venture into the world of business. We thank our Foundation Friends for supporting this valuable Oklahoma oral history service VoicesofOklahoma.com.