

INSTITUTE *Insights*

A LOOK AT THE PEOPLE, PROGRAMS AND SERVICES OF
THE ST. LOUIS PSYCHOANALYTIC INSTITUTE

THE ADVENTURES OF DR. ELSIE MEYERS, VOLUNTEER PAR EXCELLENCE

BY LESLE WEINSTEIN

The next time you feel uninspired, consider Dr. Elsie Meyers. You may know her as the petite woman who volunteers on Thursday mornings at the Institute, but if you speak with her, you will find out what the words “inspiration” and “energy” really mean.

Dr. Meyers may tell you that she “loves when it rains,” and the reason is simple. During the Depression as a young girl, Dr. Meyers learned the value of hard work as the oldest of five children in an Indiana farm family. One summer she “cultivated 40 acres of corn four times, using a one-row riding cultivator pulled by two white mules.” She says that when rain resulted in soil that was too wet to cultivate, she was ecstatic to escape the boredom of working in the hot, sunny fields.

Those hard times and her family’s success set the stage for Dr. Meyers’s future. She learned to tackle the challenges of life in ways unique to her spirit and determination. Although she graduated as valedictorian of her high school class and was awarded a college scholarship, she did not have the remaining financial resources to go to school. Her solution was to take a job as a “Girl Friday” for two family practitioners to save up for college. Her responsibilities included performing lab tests, acting as receptionist and bookkeeper, assisting with medical procedures, and even shoveling coal into the furnace.

When World War II was declared, most of the doctors in the community were called to service, and she

helped out those left behind by becoming a “teen-age midwife.”

After three years of hard work, Elsie had saved enough to attend Indiana University as a pre-med student. Coming from a rural high school, she was not prepared for the chemistry, physics or advanced math courses required for her major. She persevered, succeeded and found herself interviewing for medical school three years later. Dr. Meyers’s approach to medical school was in keeping with her spirit and determination. Time after time she was told by professors and administrators that “no one can work their way through medical school—it’s impossible,” and Dr. Meyers heard it as a challenge. She worked during the summers and takes great pride in the fact that, upon graduation from Indiana’s medical school, “I had \$640.00 left over.”

On the first day her first year as an intern at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, she met her husband, Dr. Robert Meyers, then a neurology resident. They married, pursued their careers and started a family. In fact, before she had finished her residency training in anesthesiology, their first baby arrived and Bob was called for duty as a neurologist in the Korean Conflict. After his return, they settled down in Philadelphia for 15 years, where Bob finished psychoanalytic training and practiced medicine. Busy as she was with her children and family, Elsie took two years to study art there at the Barnes Foundation.

The Meyers family moved to St. Louis in 1968 when Bob accepted an invitation to work as a training psychoanalyst at the newly founded St. Louis Psychoanalytic Institute. In St. Louis, Elsie discovered a need for *(over)*



Elsie Meyers, M.D.

anesthesiology expertise at the two major medical schools. She and her family decided it was time for her to finish her medical training. She spent a year as a resident in anesthesiology at the former Jewish Hospital in St. Louis, then a summer at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia in a pediatric fellowship. After nearly a year in private practice, Elsie joined the newly founded Department of Anesthesiology at Washington University School of Medicine, where she practiced and taught for 30 years, passing her specialty boards and working her way up from instructor to full professor. She specialized in ophthalmic anesthesiology and was known as "Mother Goose," because she especially loved working with children and telling them stories to reduce their fright.

Bob and Elsie's life of 54 years together has been full of fascinating travels and experiences. About her travels, Dr. Meyers says the high point was reaching the top of the Alps when they hiked the St. Goddard pass. Not surprisingly, this tireless woman mentions other hiking trips when recalling favorite trips around the world, such as those through the Cotswolds and New Zealand. These days, on the heels of her husband's retirement, the couple is looking forward to a transatlantic trip this fall on the Queen Mary II, as well as continuing trips to visit their youngest grandchildren in Brisbane, Australia.

Despite her impressive professional resume and world travels, Dr. Meyers' heart remains defined by her early family farm life. Her mother is thriving at 104 and lives with her sister and family in Colorado. A few years ago, her mother needed to fill time on her hands, so Elsie pieced quilts for her mother to quilt by hand. Together, they donated scores of quilts to the Riley Children's Hospital in Indianapolis. At the age of 103, her mother tired of quilting and now stays busy crocheting and reading, while Dr. Meyers continues piecing, quilting and donating quilts to the hospital. She recently

had a quilt show at her 55th medical school reunion.

At present, the Meyers' older daughter, Linda, lives in Columbus, Ohio, and, following a career in the business world, is working on her PhD. Their second daughter, Deborah, initially studied art and archaeology and became a professional photographer. Later she graduated from medical school, interned, finished her residency in internal medicine and a fellowship in cardiology, and now works as a cardiologist in Brisbane, Australia. Their third daughter, Cynthia, received a college degree in Japanese language and Asian studies, after which she switched gears to operate a wholesale bakery. Recently she completed a Master's in Education and hopes to teach as a math specialist in high school or college. Regarding her five grandchildren, Dr. Meyers reports that one has an MBA, one is in law school and three are in grade school.

On the spectrum of life, Dr. Elsie Meyers has experienced more color and brilliance than most. She has not compromised or demurred, whether she was facing a hard day's work in Indiana's unforgiving farm country, or a quick trip to Australia to care for her grandchildren. She has succeeded as a physician, mother, wife and daughter, and she now succeeds as a dedicated volunteer at the St. Louis Psychoanalytic Institute. As it turns out, the words "inspiration" and "energy" only begin to describe Dr. Elsie Meyers.

Leslie Weinstein, MA, MSW, is currently completing a practicum at the Institute's Schiele Clinic, as well as her first year in the Institute's APP program. Leslie brings previous experience as a hospital chaplain and as a professional writer to her current training.

For those who seek an understanding of emotional life, the St. Louis Psychoanalytic Institute is an educational center that provides insights into core human dilemmas from childhood through adulthood.