

Historic Bakersfield & Kern County, California

www.HistoricBakersfieldAndKernCounty.com

MILT YOUNGER'S BAKERSFIELD

1931 – 1957

Ver3

By Gilbert P. Gia

Copyright © 2010, 2017, Gilbert P. Gia, Bakersfield, California

This work is free for the classroom use of publicly-supported schools and libraries. Photographs are the exclusive property of Milton Younger, and their replication other than single copies for personal reference is prohibited. Commercial entities that wish to reproduce *Milt Younger's Bakersfield* may request permission from Gilbert Gia at ggiaggia@gmail.com

The text represents several interviews done between 2010 and 2017
Leonard Winters, a friend of Younger, was present at two of the interviews.

Gilbert Gia: Don Clark interviewed you and Betty in 2005 for Great Biographies of Bakersfield.¹ The video was informative, but it left me wanting to know more about your growing-up in Bakersfield, and I thought your story would be inspirational for young people. Thank you for allowing me to interview you and learn more about that period of your life.

¹ Milton M. Younger and Betty Lee Hoenshell were married in 1959.

Milt Younger: Well, there's not a lot to tell, but you're welcome. What would you like to know?

G: The video didn't say much about your parents.

Y: They both came from Europe. My dad, Louis J. Younger, was born in 1893 in Hungary, was orphaned when he was fourteen, later went to New York, and then moved to South Carolina where he lived with a relative at Sumter. He told me he drove a wagon there and sold candy and cigarettes. My father next returned to New York and worked in a clothing store. His next move was to Los Angeles where he did the same kind of work. In 1920 he came to Bakersfield to work for Abe and Anne Riegler,² and he also worked at Isaac Rubin's Emporium.

Y: My mother, Celia, was born in Austria. Her parents died when she was about twelve, and she came to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to live with a relative and after that to

² Abe Riegler married Anne Birnbaum. Abe ran a used clothing store in Bakersfield at 1121 19th St. (Bakersfield Californian, Jul 10, 1912). In 1918 he owned a pawn shop at the same location, and in 1919 he advertised to buy Liberty Bonds from the public. (Bakersfield Californian, Jun 28, 1919). When he died in 1933 he owned a high-item clothing store at 1316 19th St.

Bakersfield to live with Anne Riegler, who was her cousin.

My parents met here in Bakersfield.



Celia, Milton, and Louis Younger

Y: My sister, Betty, was born first. She attended KC,³ served in the WAVES, and went to Hunter College in New York. She married Bob Cohn. I was born at Mercy Hospital on July 8, 1931. My godfather was Abe Riegler. He had a store, but he made his money gambling. I remember he wore a diamond stick pin.

³ Milt's sister was eight years older than he. Kern County Union High School (KC) became Bakersfield High School in 1945.



Riegler hosts Bill Boss who was a bartender on 19th Street.

Bakersfield Californian, March 17, 1933

G: Can you tell me how your father got his store?

Y: I'm not sure but I think Abe Riegler helped. After Abe died, my father opened Younger's Working Man's Store at 1223-19th. That's near the southeast corner of 19th and M Street ... about three blocks east of Chester Avenue.⁴

⁴ In 1919, 1223-19th was the address of Winer's Store that sold ladies and men's hats. (Bakersfield Californian, Dec 5, 1919)



Younger's Working-Man's Store, about 1947

Left to right: Long-time Younger employee Ed Richardson, unidentified employee, employee Sam Silverstein, Louis Younger.

Y: The store had oiled, wooden floors, the same kind as most other buildings in that section of town. It had a basement that ran the whole length of the block, it seemed to me. In front of the store, in the sidewalk, was a steel door that could be opened to stair leading down to the basement. Above the store was a rooming house. Johnny Conley, a kid a couple of years older than me, lived there with his father. Johnny taught me how to flag red trucks, and I still do that every time I see a red

truck.⁵ Most of the stores on 19th had second floors that were rooming houses or hotels. I heard that some people who came to Bakersfield to shop would stay over the night in the hotels.

G: The neighborhood around 19th Street sounds like it was a thriving place.

Y: Younger's Working Man's Store was open for business Monday through Saturday and half-day on Sundays. My mother and my sister worked there, and after I was twelve I spent a lot of time working there and waiting on customers. I remember the other men's clothing store that was across the street near the Virginia Theater. My father was in competition with its owner.⁶ When one of us put up a sales sign, the other one would put up his sign the next day.

⁵ Y: When you see a red truck, you go like this. (He demonstrates a four-step series of hand-motions depicting trapping and tallying.) When you've done 100 red trucks, your wish comes true, but it doesn't work if you keep track of how many you've counted. | G: You mean you never know exactly how many you've counted? | Younger: Yes.

⁶ Meyer Makoff's Men's Clothing, 1121-19th St



Celia and Louis Younger

My father maintained that business for almost 30 years and probably would have gone on longer if it weren't for the fire and earthquake. He had both of them.

G: Your father lost his building?

Y: We had to close a few days after the earthquake of '52, and the fire did a lot of damage to the inside of the building. But we didn't own it. It belonged to Himovitz. My father leased it then.

G: What were some of the other stores nearby?

Y: The Brass Rail bar was at the southeast corner of 19th and L, and next to it was Samuel Wolf's food store. There was a

rooming house above it. To the east of Wolf's was my father's store. Then was Art Tognini's drugstore, and next door was Katz' secondhand store. It also had a hotel above it. Next to Katz' was the Ever Ready Cafe and the Mint bar. Joe Bertolaccini's clothing store was the next door, and then came Bakersfield Seed & Feed at 1201-19th that belonged to Michel.⁷ He was in the building after WWII when my dad bought the property. The feed store later became the First and Last Chance Saloon, and then it was a women's dress shop.

Y: Sam Fleischman had a liquor store across the street. He did very well. In the next block east, on the corner on the south side, was the Mission Hotel.⁸ Anne Riegler managed it.

Y: Across the street from my father's store was the Virginia Theater and next to it was Owen's toy store. That was a popular place for us kids, and I went in there a lot. Nobody ever told you to stop playing with the toys.

Y: Mrs. Tuis was the bartender next door to the Bakersfield Hotel, and I think she became the owner.⁹ The cop on the

⁷ In 1938 it was at 1300-19th.

⁸ The hotel was at 1125-1/2 19th at the southeast corner of 19th and M. In 1938 it was the Parkway Hotel, and Abe Riegler was still listed as manager. The Parkway is known as the Mission Hotel today.

street was old man Taylor. He once got into a scuffle with a drunk, and the businessmen came out to help him. After Taylor retired, Charlie Dodge took over the beat.

G: Where was your family's home?

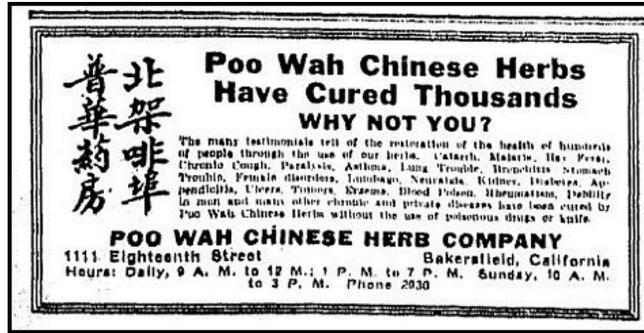
Y: We were at 1208-17th Street.¹⁰ Today the address is behind Bill Lee's in its parking lot. Our house was next to the large palm tree there.

Y: The neighborhood was really mixed. We had Hispanic, Chinese, and Greek kids living all around us--Jack Wong's house, Nicky's house, and the rest. Nicky's father ran a bar on L between 18th and 19th, and Dr. Poo Wah had an herb shop at the northeast corner of 18th and N.¹¹

⁹ In 1938 at 1202-19th

¹⁰ In 1930, Louis Younger lived at 1517 26th St.

¹¹ When Younger saw the Poo Wah address in the ad (below), he commented, "Well, my memory is different than that."



Bakersfield Californian, April 29, 1937

Y: Those families were diverse and had strong personalities. I played with all the kids, got along well, and became a fairly decent athlete, which helped a lot.

G: How about at school?

Y: School was good. I was president of student government at Franklin and Emerson Schools, president of my senior class at Bakersfield High School, and I was also class valedictorian.

G: Can you tell me a little more about your parents?

Y: My father spoke several languages, and my mother was a bright lady, too, but because of their backgrounds neither of them had much of a formal education. They had gone through adversity and had good reason to work hard to succeed.

Y: My parents were constantly encouraging me. I was their only son, and I became what you might call a Jewish Prince.

G: What does that mean?



Milt Younger, cowboy

Y: It's not exactly like what it sounds. My parents always told me I could accomplish anything, and they encouraged me to do whatever I wanted. They had the confidence and belief that anything was possible for me. But a lot of things were expected from me, too, and I didn't want to let them down.

Y: When I was four, my father brought home for me a 48-volume set of the Encyclopedia Britannica, and when I was five I was reading Greek mythology from those books. I had an attraction to words. Language was and still is very important to me.

G: Did "do anything" mean you could do no wrong?

Y: Well, maybe. But I didn't want to let them down. That's not to say I was without childish misbehavior. When I was eight or nine, Nicky and I got into the First Baptist Church after their Sunday service. That building is an historical monument now – office space and this Bell Tower Club. Anyway, we explored around. I think Nick led me astray.¹² He was a wild Greek kid.

G: How did he lead you astray that time?

Y: We climbed up into church's bell tower to fight the bats. Then we heard a policeman calling, "How did you kids get up there? Don't come down! It's too dangerous." We didn't come down. We were scared of getting caught. The cop called the fire department, and they brought the ladder truck. The *Californian* took a picture of us on the ladder. Sometime after that, we tried to climb the Clock Tower at 17th and Chester and got away with it that time.

G: What did your parents say about the church caper?

¹² George Antonaris, a contemporary of Milt Younger, told me about a football game between BHS and EB during which time Nick led the BHS cheering section in an improvised cheer: "Ska-ta, Ska-ta, Ziss Goom Bah!" (Bleachers echoed that back.) "Ess, Kah, Ah, Tah, Ah!" (Louder response). "Ska-TAAA! EAST!" (Huge response). George explained, "You know, it was really funny because none of the teachers knew that skata, σκατα in Greek, means, well, crap."

Y: I don't remember any great hullabaloo about it.

G: Any more stories like that?

Y: One comes to mind. When I was at BHS, Jimmy Vigneau and I were in Homer Likely's Chemistry class. The thing was, Likely's glasses were real thick. He couldn't hardly see anything up close, let alone what was going on in the back of the room. Well, Jimmy and I swiped a pound of sodium from the lab.

G: Why sodium?

Y: 'Cause it was fascinating stuff! Anyway, that night when we were going past the mill pond--across the street from the old jail--we threw the whole thing in the water.¹³ A geyser ten-feet tall shot up and the lights went on in the jail. They never found out who did it.

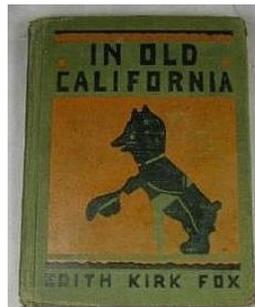
G: Tell me about Franklin School.

Y: I started at Franklin at the time it faced onto 17th Street, and the playground backed up to Truxtun Avenue. The school was

¹³ Mill Pond was on the northeast corner of Truxtun and Q. The Kern County Jail was across the street on the northwest corner. For a history of the jails see *Jails at Havilah and Bakersfield, 1866-1963*, v2 at <https://www.historicbakersfieldandkerncounty.com/crime>

two-stories then. When I was in First Grade I tested at 11th Grade in reading, and my teacher, Carolyn Harris, didn't know what to do with me. So they let me work in the principal's office a lot.

Y: Tests along the way showed I was smart, but Franklin School also had great teachers. There was a lot of nurturing there. Edith Fox, my Fourth-Grade teacher was a published author, and she brought in *Wind in the Canyon* [1948] for us to see.



In Old California by Edith Fox ¹⁴

Y: Miss Fox thought I could write, and she showed me how writers write. When I wrote in later years I went back to Miss Fox.

¹⁴ Edith Kirk Fox, *In Old California*. Illustrations from cut-out work by pupils in the author's fourth grade of the Bakersfield, California, schools. New York: Macmillan, 1927

Y: Teachers like her, and Carolyn Harris too, emphasized the joy of writing and learning. Miss Harris once said to me, "You talk so much; you would be a good lawyer." Encouragement like that made a great difference in my life. I had ability, but I also owe a lot to the many people who helped me, and I owe a real debt to my early teachers.

G: Did your parents give you any private lessons?

Y: They got me a violin when I was four or five years old. Not long after that I was on the bandstand at Kern River Park¹⁵ playing "Ach Du Lieber Augustin."

¹⁵ Hart Memorial Park



Carlyle Nelson and pupils. Milton Younger in front.

I played it three times, one time after the other until Carlyle Nelson, my teacher, hustled me off the stage.¹⁶ My next teacher was Max Bayless, and after him, around 1941, was Aram Der Zakarian. He had a studio in the xxx building that was on Eye and 18th Street until the 1952 earthquake. When I took lessons about half the time was him explaining his method of

¹⁶ For information about Carlyle Nelson see *Playing at the Mandarin Nightclub* at <https://www.historicbakersfieldandkerncounty.com/persons>

predicting the futures market. The walls were plastered with graphs and charts. Aram Der Zakarian more a friend than a violin teacher. Once he told me he would show me how to play a piece, but even at my age then I knew it was not well played. By then he had mostly given up his interest in the violin and was focused almost completely on his mathematical scheme for beating the stock market. He was also a Communist. After we finished my lesson we also discussed politics and I went with him a couple of time to cell meetings.. Another teacher was Harold Burt. He was the high school orchestra teacher and also was, briefly, conductor of the Kern Philharmonic.¹⁷

Y: I played violin with the Kern Philharmonic and with the BHS orchestra.¹⁸ While I was at Stanford I played violin, but when I came back to Bakersfield I stopped. I suppose I could have been a better player if I'd kept at it, but I had new goals and responsibilities, and I was really working hard at being a lawyer.

G: When you were 12, you and a kid named Keith Abbott performed a skit called "If I Were a Teacher for Just One Hour"

¹⁷ Precursor of Bakersfield Symphony

¹⁸ Younger was president of the BHS orchestra.

at Washington School Auditorium, and you did it in front of teachers, supervisors, principals, and superintendents. Did Miss Edith Fox have anything to do with that?

Y: I don't remember. She was at Franklin, but she might have been an advisor. We did that skit when I was a pupil at Emerson, when Emerson was at Truxtun and K.

G: What year did you start Bakersfield High?

Y: I started in 1945. I got into sports, but I wasn't very big so I had to play with the light-weight guys. I ran track. I've stayed physically active all my life.



Milt Younger, BHS graduation portrait

Y: I was also in student body activities, and I was a political guy. Elvin Hedgecock was my debate and speech teacher. He was very encouraging and was an important influence on me.¹⁹

Y: I kept getting elected to offices. I joined the interracial council about 1948 because at that time there were growing tensions between the black students and white students. But in those years it wasn't gangs or significant drug problems.



Milt Younger taking us around town

Leonard Winters: One time someone threw a bottle out of the Sixth Floor window of the Padre, and it hit the Hoenshells' gas station across the street. The Hoenshell brothers lined up the

¹⁹ Among many other achievements at BHS, Younger won debate championships at Southern California Oratorical and San Joaquin Valley Debates.

angle that the bottle came from, and they located the window in the Padre. They went up there and beat the hell out of somebody.²⁰



Hoenshell's station. Behind to the west is the Padre Hotel.

Y: Yes, Rosse Hoenshell was a tough customer.²¹ His father, my wife's grandfather, homesteaded here at 18th and H Street.

Betty's grandfather had a part in the construction of the Ice

²⁰ In this instance Younger's friend Leonard Winters (born about 1917) sat next to him in front. Winters had been an investigator for Chain and Younger.

²¹ Rosse Hoenshell attended KCUHS, Bakersfield Junior College, and graduated in Accounting from U.C.

House on Chester Avenue north of the circle, and he built the Hoenshell gas station across from the Padre.²²

Y: Southwest of the Padre was the McMahan's house. They tore it down and built a furniture store, their first of about 50 of them. The Padre parking garage was in the next block west.²³

Y: The McMahan's daughter married a Judd and opened a women's high-fashion dress shop on the corner that's east of the Padre garage.

G: When did the Hoenshells arrive here?

Y: Betty's father's family came to Bakersfield early. The Hoenshells did very well in wholesale tires and auto parts, and they invested in property. Betty's mother was a Baldwin of the Lucky Baldwin line.²⁴

G: What other businesses were nearby?

²² The ice manufacturing plant was built about 1902. Dave Hoenshell was president of the carpenters' union, and he built Bakersfield residences, three of which are extant on the south side of 22nd St between P and Q.

²³ The garage became Vincent Clerou's Cyclery. See *Vincent Clerou and his Bicycles* at <https://www.historicbakersfieldandkerncounty.com/business>

²⁴ Elias Jackson "Lucky" Baldwin, 1828–1909

Y: Well, it isn't nearby, but how about this -- At 10th and Chester was a restaurant called *Mr. and Mrs. of Radio Fame*. The couple who owned it actually had been on the radio.

Winters: Hollis Roberts was an extremely wealthy man. He was a powerful man, 6-6, 300 pounds. He owned 100,000 acres.

G: Milt, were you in farming, too?

Y: Curt Darling²⁵ and I were partners in a walnut orchard operation, 110 acres, and Roberts farmed it for us. We ended up selling all but 60-acres to the Hershey Company. Our 60-acres was put into peaches, but it wasn't profitable because if you had peaches the only place you could sell them was to the cannery, and they dictated the price.

G: Where did you work when you were a teenager?

Y: I clerked at my father's store while I was in high school, but the first summer after Stanford, when I was 19, I worked in the oilfields, and I did the same thing for the next six summers.

Y I started out as a production roughneck for Miller and York, A.R. Montgomery, and Blue Barnes Core Drilling doing well pulling. Mr. Barnes had become successful and was by then

²⁵ Prominent Bakersfield attorney

loaning money to others who were getting into the oil business. We worked seven day a week, 12 hours a day for \$2 an hour. This work was called working a bull-shit rig. Anyway, it was pretty good money. The other summers I rough-necked for a number of different drilling contractors. My last summer there I was a derrick man. More money. If you don't know, a derrick man works above, and a roughneck works below on the platform. Both of those jobs were tower work. That just means the shifts were irregular. I made almost enough in those summers to pay my entire way to Stanford. Of course my parents helped me, too. Oh, the tuition in 1949 was \$220 a quarter.

G: What were those oil men like?

Y: They were rough, all white, and mostly from Oklahoma or Texas. I made pretty good friendships when I was doing that work. Years later I represented some of the same men who I'd worked with, men who'd been hurt on rigs. One of the proudest things I've done as a lawyer was to represent people injured in the oilfield as the result of defective equipment.

Y: It's a much misunderstood point of law that you can't sue your employer for injuries, and Workers' Compensation isn't much better than welfare. I was one of the first in this area to get compensation from manufacturers for those men who had lost an arm or leg because the reciprocating parts didn't have safety guards. That changed the industry's interest in safety, and it no doubt saved the lives of many men who would have been killed or maimed.

(The interview below was another day)

G: How was your father involved in the community, other than in his business?

Y: He was a founding member of the B'nai Jacob Synagogue that used to be at 13th and H Streets.²⁶ For 30 years he was in charge of Jewish Charities.²⁷ After WWII, I helped my father with his taxes. One year his gross annual income from the store was \$46,000. His charitable contributions to various charities that year came up to \$16,000. On the other hand, I know of

²⁶ In 1921 B'nai Jacob Synagogue moved into the former Woman's Club Hall at 16th and H. (Bakersfield Californian, Mar 27, 1921)

²⁷ At a Hanukkah festival in 1936, five year-old Milt Younger played the part of Judas Maccabeus, that great warrior of Jewish history. When I asked Younger if his parents had lobbied for him to get the part, he replied, "No. I was the [only?] one who could do it."

two established and wealthy downtown businessmen who were schnorrers when it came to giving. My father had to practically get down on his knees and beg them to donate to Jewish Charities.

G: The money was for international relief?

Y: That and it was also used locally.

Y: My father's own giving happened every day at the store. Sometimes men came in to beg, and he'd give them meal tickets to the Ever Ready Cafe next door to the Mint bar. He was a great teacher for me, and I still judge people by what they do for others.

Y: Some of those guys he helped were legitimate down-and-outers, but others had gimmicks, like the one who said he was a rabbi down on his luck. My father sometimes brought one of them home for dinner after the store closed at noon on Sunday, and that was much to my mother's displeasure.²⁸

²⁸ In 1936 the Youngers met Jack A. Levy at Santa Fe Station. Levy had come to be rabbi for B'nai Jacob Congregation (Bakersfield Californian, Oct 30, 1939). Levy was active in civic affairs and defense work and was a resource for the town. (Bakersfield Californian, Jun 28, 1943). Milt Younger said Father Thomas Early of St. Joseph's Church and Rev John Whiteneck of Congregational Church were close friends of Rabbi Jack Levy.

Mrs. Younger Announces Chairmen for 1945-1946

Standing chairmen were announced for B'nai Jacob Sisterhood when a board meeting was held re-



Mrs. Louis Younger

cently at the home of Mrs. Louis Orloff, 120 Bedford Way. Those chosen included; Mrs. Manuel Rubin, ways and means; Mrs. Murray Bierman, USO; Mrs. H. K. Bernard, education; Mrs. Sam Gordon, membership; Mrs. Fred Mooney, hospitality; Mrs. Morris Wiedman, telephone; Mrs. Harry Eisenstein, house committee; Mrs. Morris Himovitz, courtesy and Mrs. Oscar Drasin, publicity.

The Sisterhood announces a busy calendar for early fall. On September 21 at B'nai Jacob temple the holiday of Sukkos will be celebrated; this is better known as the harvest festival. Mrs. Eisenstein and Mrs. A. Daniels will act as hostesses.

On Friday night, September 28, Mrs. Mooney and Mrs. Orloff will be hostesses and on Saturday night, September 29, which is the last night of the festival celebration, will be an entertainment for children. Mrs. Himovitz and Mrs. Younger will act as hostesses.

There will be an open meeting for old and new members October 3 at the home of Mrs. Morris Chain.

Milt's mother, Celia Younger
Bakersfield Californian, September 20, 1945

G: Did you go to Stanford right after high school?

Y: Yes. I went to Stanford and Stanford Law School.²⁹ I was admitted to the California bar in 1957.

G: Why did you choose law?

Y: (Long pause) All I can tell you is I always thought I would be a lawyer. It might have started with my First Grade teacher's words "You like to talk so much you would make a good lawyer."

G: How was Stanford for you?

²⁹ BA, Political Science; L.L.B. 1956

Y: It was good for me. I was house manager and president at Theta Chi,³⁰ so I got room and board free for two years.³¹ My time at Stanford gave me experience in leadership and helped me in my ability to persuade people and project my meaning to them.

Y: I stayed active in sports and wrestled all four years. We were a tough group of wrestlers. We used to roughhouse pretty successfully with the footballers who came into our workout room.

Y: While I was there I had several military deferments, so after graduation I joined the Army Reserves. They stationed me at the Presidio of San Francisco, where I had a singularly undistinguished career as an officer with the Army JAG office.³² After I got out I learned that lawyers were not deeply sought after there in San Francisco, so I came back to Bakersfield.

G: To work for Chain?

³⁰ Motto: An Assisting Hand

³¹ Younger received a scholarship to Stanford Law School. Theta Chi voted him the "Man Who Contributed Most" to the welfare of the group. Younger was also a member of Phi Delta Phi legal fraternity and Pi Sigma Alpha political science society, among other associations.

³² Judge Advocate General

Y: I'd already worked for Morris Chain, the first time in 1955.³³ He knew I was in law school at Stanford. Probably heard it from my parents. Leonard Winters was working for him as an investigator, and Al Noriega was in charge of his Workers' Competition cases. Al's brother was Frank Noriega. Morrie had been in the Haberfelde Building, but at the time I first worked for him he was in the Sill Building. After I graduated in 1956, I came back to work for him. Chain was then the best-known trial lawyer in Kern County. He was skilled; when he told a story in court or even in a downtown bar everybody listened.³⁴ I did some criminal cases for Chain, but since then I've pretty much done the same kind of work I do now, personal injury claims. I learned from Chain. All young people should find a good mentor.

³³ In 1932 Morris Bertram Chain was licensed to practice law in California. He established his office in Bakersfield in 1934.

³⁴ While Chain was at KCUHS and at Bakersfield Junior College he participated in Speech, Debate, Theater, and sports (*Bakersfield Californian*, Mar 11, 1919). Chain also organized dances and wrote plays. In 1936 he ran for district attorney against Tom Scott but lost. He is remembered as a successful criminal defense attorney who won cases so frequently that Californian columnist Eddie Griffith once headlined, "Chain Does It Again!" When Chain died in 1977 Griffith wrote, "Mr. Chain had unbelievable ability in 'reading' a jury which would tend to be favorable to his usually hopeless-appearing case. I think this stemmed from his continued life-long interest in the 'little guy' and the problems of the downtrodden, generally."

G: I read you did very well at Stanford. Did that have much to do with him hiring you?

Y: Well, I was in the top five percent of my law class, and I was awarded the Order of the Coif,³⁵ but I don't know if Morris Chain knew about the award when he hired me. Of course he had known me and my family for years.

G: He must have been interesting to work for.

Y: Chain was born in 1904 in Russia and came with his family to this country. Chaimowitz was the original family name. His father had a little store on 19th Street in what we now call the Chain estate.³⁶ Morrie's brothers were Abe, Sammy, and Eddie, and all of them were products of Bakersfield schools.³⁷ Morrie, and at least one of his brothers, attended Bakersfield Junior College. Morrie went on to USC.

G: Did he go easy on you as a new attorney?

³⁵ Order of the Coif was an honorary scholastic society that recognized those law students who had attained high levels of scholarship. The Order of the Coif is known by all lawyers.

³⁶ Joe Chain owed Chain's Emporium at 1315-19th St (Bakersfield Californian, Jun 30, 1923).

³⁷ Morris Chain was KCUHS Class of 1922. He boxed with the KCUHS military cadets (Bakersfield Californian, Mar 22, 1919), ran track (Bakersfield Californian, May 5, 1922), and was quarterback on Bakersfield Jr College's winning game against Taft (Kern County Renegade, Oct 14, 1924).

Y: Morrie was a tough boss, and he expected his lawyers to work, but I was already an aggressive, hardworking young lawyer. When Betty and I were about to have our first child, I went to Morrie and asked him for a raise, to \$500 a month. He said, "How much are you going to pay me for teaching you how to be a lawyer?" I don't remember what I said to him, but he wound up giving me the \$500.

(Leonard Winters had been listening until this point.)

Winters: I was the manager of Empire Rooms that belonged to Chain. There were 27 rooms. It was a cat house. Chief Grayson and I were good friends.³⁸

Y: Leonard was our investigator, and our law clerk was Al Noriega, who'd been provost marshal at Minter Field during WWII.³⁹ His brother was Judge Frank Noriega. Al's son is Eddie Noriega, the lawyer in town today.

Winters: When I got back from working for the IRS⁴⁰ I went back to work for Chain as his investigator. I set myself up

³⁸ A cat house is a place of business for prostitutes. Horace Grayson was Bakersfield Chief of Police, 1945-1956.

³⁹ A provost marshal was a police officer.

⁴⁰ Probably in the early 1950s

between Chain and the people who he sent me out to talk to. They said they wanted to talk to him, but I said No.

Y: Yeah, they could set you up.

W: I knew that from when I worked for the government. They had laws, and if you didn't follow them you didn't last. So those guys had to talk to me first. Hell, I wouldn't do it again.

Y: Yes, you would.

W: Yeah, I had a lot of fun.

Younger: You know, Leonard was the premier private investigator in Kern County for many, many years and is responsible for the success of many of our cases. He has been involved in some very famous cases, not just here, but in famous cases throughout the country.

Winters: My father was a farmer, and I was raised in Arvin. He bought me a car, and I was the only one in high school to have one. W.B. Camp also had a car, but he was in the Junior College. When I got my Big B at the high school, Don Hart was one of the upperclassmen who was in on the initiation. They made us take off our pants and run down the bluffs. They had

guys stationed on the way down that paddled our butts every 50 feet.

Y: Len, tell him about working for Chain.

W: I left Kern County in the '40s and returned in the '50s. I took out a private investigator license, but I worked exclusively for Chain, so I really didn't need the license. I worked the Spade Cooley case.⁴¹ I still have that file. I don't know why I kept it. Anyway, Spade was a card. I used to take him food and visit him when he was up in the jail here in Bakersfield. He went to prison for life—he was a model prisoner. One time they took him out [*of Vacaville*] to Oakland to play for a police benefit. There were several thousand peace officers from the west coast in the audience. He finished playing his fiddle, went back stage and said, "They still love me," and then he had a heart attack and keeled over dead.

G: How about some of the old buildings downtown?

⁴¹ Country and western singer Spade Cooley married Ella May Evans in 1945. On Apr 3, 1961 she died at Tehachapi Valley Hospital. Cooley was convicted of torturing and beating her to death. Cooley died in prison. See *Bakersfield's trial of the century: The talented and tormented Spade Cooley* by Timothy Lemucchi (Bakersfield Californian, Jun 12, 2015)

W: There was a hotel called the Empire Rooms. In the basement were rooms where they smoked opium. Across L Street from it was George Why's market. He was one of the earliest successful Chinese businessmen. He had a basement where he kept the meat.

G: You knew some of the vice cops, didn't you?

W: I knew Butch Milligan. He was the vice officer for Horace Grayson, and some say he took money for him. Milligan had a cabin and a Cadillac. I was his pallbearer. Champness was the last sheriff to live at the jail.

W: Maurice Tice was a prohi⁴², and he was the East Bakersfield town marshal for years. Tice was a Chi Phi (XΦ) at KC. The high school fraternities were gone when I went there [c. 1933], but those older guys who had been Chi Phi's basically ran the town later on when they were adults.

Y: Johnny Loustalot⁴³ was Chi Phi and a high school debate partner with Morris Chain.... Len, remember Sam Fleischman, the retired Jewish architect. He and his wife opened a liquor store in the First and Last Chance Saloon after John Dimas had

⁴² Prohibition officer

⁴³ John E. Loustalot became Kern County Sheriff.

left and moved across the street to the southwest corner. ⁴⁴ His adopted daughter, Mary Metropolis, took over when it was still a bar. You know where it was, Len, over on the corner under the Bakersfield Hotel.

W: I burned the damn place down. Dick Stricklin⁴⁵ and those guys used to have breakfast at the Padre. They ran the town.

Y: Gere Restituto was real. He wasn't like the little crooks. Gere always thought he was a gangster, and he was about half-way right. You didn't screw around with Gere. He had gambling in the back room of his motel on Union Avenue, the El Adobe.⁴⁶

W: I remember Gere. After the war I was at Reno working for Beamer in the IRS income-tax evasion department. I kept Restituto out of the penitentiary twice. One time he wanted to buy a car from the IRS, and the IRS kept its cars down on Battery Street in San Francisco. I made arrangement for him to buy one of the beat-up federal cars. I was there with him when

⁴⁴ 19th and L

⁴⁵ Stricklin owned GMC Motor City on Union Avenue.

⁴⁶ Gere Restituto and Jimmy Bonnaventura were joint owner of the Crystal Inn (Bakersfield Californian, Jul 11, 1946). See Nightclubs: *El Adobe and Crystal Inn* at <https://www.historicbakersfieldandkerncounty.com/business>

he was signing a check. The clerk asked me, "Leonard, are you going to vouch for this check?" I said, "Sure."

W: I had a hard time getting away from the government. They wanted to know why you wanted to quit. When I finally was able to quit, I came back to Bakersfield. I'd known Morris Chain in relation to an accident I was in in Bakersfield years before. I had some credentials and experience from working with the IRS, and when I went to work for Morrie I was the only investigator working for an attorney here.

G: Did you have any interesting cases?

W: Oscar Catalano. He was the lawyer who was in a wheel chair. He was a goddamn good lawyer, but when he was upstairs in his office in the Hopkins Building at 19th and Chester, Dr. Berni shot him. That's what put him in the wheelchair. ⁴⁷

⁴⁷ "Attractive Mrs. Jan Berni, above, is reported to have witnessed the shooting of Oscar Catalano by her husband, Dr. Daniel Berni in Bakersfield, Calif. She recently obtained a divorce from Dr. Berni, with Catalano acting as her lawyer. Dr. and Mrs. Berni later were reconciled." (Palm Beach Daily News, Jan 8, 1947). See *The People vs Daniel Berni* at <https://www.historicbakersfieldandkerncounty.com/crime>

Y: Yeah, that was a story, but getting back to Gere Restituto, I know his son Sammy, a good guy. I used to workout with him at Babe's Gym.⁴⁸ Babe and I became partner when I was 17 and he was 22. I put up \$500 in the gym. After workouts, Sammy and I and others went across the street to the Cellar Bar. If you see Sammy, tell him you saw me. I grew up on 17th Street with his wife, Irene Balasis. Her parents had a little grocery store at 17th and O and also the concessions at Hart Park.⁴⁹

(On this day Younger was driving us around downtown.)

G: Was there a park east across the street from the Haberfelde Building?

Y: The American Legion used to have a big park across K Street from the hotel.⁵⁰ The veterans marched around there, and I played football on that park. San Joaquin Bank, which is now Citizens Bank, is now on the grounds.

⁴⁸ Mario "Babe" Cantieny who operated the gym at 1927-1/2 Eye Street in 1961. In the mid-1960 it became Babe's Gym.

⁴⁹ See the Balasis family story at *One Hundred Years at Hart Park* <https://www.historicbakersfieldandkerncounty.com/community>

⁵⁰ Bank of America Building at Truxtun and Chester was built on the former site of Hotel El Tejon.

W: Steve Strellich had a gym at 17th and K. His wife Loretta was a good-looking woman, tall and stately.⁵¹

(Younger continued driving)

Y: That palm tree over there is where 1208-17th Street used to be, where my house was. There was a vacant lot next door, and next to that was Jack Wong's house. He ran Wing's Cafe. Not Earl Wong. He was a legitimate businessman. Over there was the New Lincoln Market, his store.⁵²

G: Not a legitimate businessman?

Y: Jack Wong was a gambler. A lot of the merchants on 19th Street, Jewish or Chinese --or what-ever-in-the hell -- used to play Fan-Tan in the back room of Wings Cafe, but they never played with real money on the table. They played with chits, and when I was seven or eight I would carry the chits around on my bicycle for them. I was their bag man.

⁵¹ Strellich Brother's Gym was set back on a parking lot that replaced the park. Steve and Loretta Strellich later owned Strellich Stadium on V St. It was later called The Dome. See Steve Strellich, Boxing, Wrestling, and his Stadium at <https://www.historicbakersfieldandkerncounty.com/sports>

⁵² L and 20th

Y: Meyer Rifkin! Len, have you thought of him?⁵³ He had a shoe repair store on the corner of the alley near Bill Lee's and the New Lincoln Market. Between them was the blacksmith's shop where Lackey shod horses and resurfaced plows, things like that.

Y: In this alley was Mrs. Tuis's house. It was set back on the property and faced 17th. She owned the bar on 19th next to Manuel Carnakis's Virginia Theater.⁵⁴ Next to Mrs. Tuis's was Jack Wong's house. Then my house. Next came Fred Gribble's house. Mr. Gribble was town mayor and a building contractor. So that's all in this block. I'll turn around here.

Y: Okay, here we are back to the Bakersfield Chicken Shop at 17th and L. They killed the chickens in back, I kid you not. In the '30s and '40s this alley we're looking at was exactly the way you see it now. It even has the same cracks in the

⁵³ In the WWI draft for Kern County, Meyer Rifkin was No. 732 on the draft roll. (Bakersfield Californian, Oct 12, 1918)

⁵⁴ John Carnakis, father of Manuel Carnakis, owned a Taft theater and came to Bakersfield in 1916. He bought the theater at 1224 19th from M.T. Ledoux, aka Madame Maria Therese Brignaudy (Kern County Deed 0346-0354, Mar 1, 1920). The theater, operated under several names and in recent years was Cinema 19 Adult Theater & Bookstore. For Brignaudy history see *Mme. Brignaudy in the Bakersfield Tenderloin, 1905-1933* at <https://www.historicbakersfieldandkerncounty.com/crime>

concrete as when I was a child. There were several wood garages in the alley. One of them was ours, and in one of the garages Jack Wong (of Wing's Cafe) made his noodles. The dough was on a table, and Jack hired a little 90-lb Chinese guy to jump up and down on one end of an eight foot bamboo pole to make the noodle dough flat. That's how they kneaded it.

Y: Here's the brick Carnakis house where John Carnakis lived. He was the original owner. He also owned the Virginia Theater and the candy store next door to it. He made some money, went to Athens, and brought back a bride. He built the brick building as a Greek town house. I think Sherman Lee owns it now.

G: What are those brick buildings over there?

Y: That's the old AB Dick building and the National Cash Register building. The older brick building next to it used to be a machine shop. It is really old, older than anything around it. Things have really changed.

Winters: Yeah, they knocked down my cat house. Jeannie Martini was a pretty well-known madam.⁵⁵ I used to see her down there at the old Tiny's at 18th and Chester.⁵⁶ Butch Milligan, the vice cop, was my best friend at the police department, and Grayson was the chief. I ate with Grayson three or four nights a week. He lived on 21st Street. I got mad at Grayson when he only promoted Milligan to sergeant. He should have got lieutenant. Grayson gave it to him later when there was an opening. I can tell you this, one guy ran the town then, and it was Horace Grayson. He was the last ruler.

G: What about the Sheriff's Office?

W: I knew Sheriff Champness, a big, tall guy. He was the last one to actually live in the old jail, in the apartment up there. Later he moved out to the Di Georgio Farms ranch where he'd been superintendent. I knew Steve Strellich, too. He had the stadium on V Street. I saw James Cagney there one night.

Y: Franklin Wong ran a drive-in at 18th and L. I think he was a son of Bill Lee, one of the sons born in China. Everybody liked

⁵⁵ Jeannie Martini reportedly owned the Troy Hotel across the street south of Central Park. The Troy was next to Iverson's two-story, brick furniture store, now still standing. The Troy was razed after the earthquake of 1952.

⁵⁶ A corner restaurant

Franklin's wife. She was good-looking and out-going and spoke with a Southern accent.

Y: Farther down 19th is the Mint Bar. But right here was the Every Ready Cafe I told you about. Over here on the left at 19th and L was the Rex Theater,⁵⁷ and next to it on the corner was the Rex Candy shop owned by the Samos family. Greeks owned both theaters, the Rex and the Virginia.

W: The Chain estate was at 20th and L Street. Morris owned the Empire Rooms there for 15 or 20 years. It fronted on 20th. I kind of ran the hotel as a sideline for him. Underneath it were tunnels and cribs. I'd give \$10,000 to find any pictures of those cribs. They smoked opium there. The panels fit together. The Empire was a cat house, but we cleaned it up. I still have one of the matchbooks at home. It says "Where the Elite Meet to Sleep."

Y: There were hotels all along 19th Street, all on the second floors on both sides. At 1223-19th was my dad's store, Younger's Working Man's Store. Next to him was Wolf's Market,

⁵⁷ Abe Samos owned the Rex Theater at the southwest corner of 19th and L. Younger identified the northwest corner of 19th and L as the Cohn Estate. The family is not related to Milt Younger's sister's husband.

replaced by Alan's Pawn shop. He had a son, Bruce. Tall. Moved to San Francisco.

Y: On the east side of my dad's were two stores that used to look a lot bigger to me. This one was Art Tognini's Drug store.⁵⁸ Over there across the street where the little door is, next to the entrance to the old Virginia Theater, was the Virginia Candy Shop owned by the Carnakises. They made their money on the candy but not so much on the movies they showed. The store at 1219 was Lou Orloff's hardware. He was a son of Sam Orloff of Taft. Lou's son Ronnie became a lawyer in LA. The next shop was old man Katz' second-hand store next to the Mint Bar (1207-19th St). Next was the Eveready Cafe where my dad bought meal tickets that he gave away to the beggars. The tattoo place on L Street is built of concrete block, so it's a newer building. It wasn't there in the '40s. A drive-in was here where the parking lot is.

W: Every one of the hotels had a cat house upstairs.

⁵⁸ From a business card: "Arthur Tognini, manager, *Save More Drug Store*, No. 2 *Farmacia Italiana*, 1219 Nineteenth St."

Y: There's the Mint Bar at 1207. The building my father bought is at 1219.⁵⁹ Michel's feed store was in there. I went to school with their nephew Ted. The store later became John Dimas' bar. His sign said First Chance-Last Chance. Across L Street was Riegler's Mission Hotel. I think the building was in the Himovitz estate.⁶⁰ Yah, it was. The hotel part was on the second floor. I used to think of Anne Riegler as my aunt, but she was my mother's cousin. Rebecca and Sophie were her sisters, and they were our closest relatives here. After the war we didn't have any relatives left in Europe. *(Pause)* The next store front was Sherry's Liquors.

Winters: I used to work for them. I burned down the building across the street from it. I was only 17 years old at the time.

Y: Leonard, this corner is the liquor store I was talking about. It was owned by the retired Jewish architect Sam Fleischman and his wife. They had it for years. And right over there at 20th and L was the Empire Hotel "Where the Elite Meet to Sleep." On

59 Younger said his father bought the property because he was never sure if Himovitz would renew the lease.

60 In 1915 Morris Himovitz owned the Bakersfield Junk Co. In 1941 he owned Bakersfield Pipe Supply Co. He was president of B'nai Jacob Congregation until 1939. Younger said Himovitz owned most of 19th St between L and M: "These families worked hard, saved their money, and bought property."

the corner, on that dirt lot, was George Why's Washington Market.⁶¹ The building on the left has been rebuilt. Just next to it across the alley was a fish market owned by Japanese. When they were interned in 1942, a Chinese family got it. The Ruben Brothers' place at the northwest corner of 18th and L was on the right.

Y: I can go down the right side and tell you every building that was here. That was Manny and Harry Rubin's pawnshop. Al Goldwater is their son-in-law. He later opened the Emporium men's store, but at first it was a Rubin production. Their daughter married Al Goldwater. I was at their wedding.

⁶¹ 1917/1919-17th St. George Why was probably Leoung Wing Why. The name appears in Hall of Records Notice No. 10247 re an exchange of a beer and wine and distilled spirits license for the Washington Market. J.S. Chin was Why's partner. Two other Chinese names appear as sellers in the transaction (Bakersfield Californian, Apr 22, 1942).



Milt Younger

Y: Pioneer Mercantile was originally at 21st and Eye Streets. I'll drive over and show you where it was. Over there is the Sill Building. It was built in 1939 and is still one of the most contemporary buildings in town. The Anglo-California Bank was across the street. I used to ride my bike over here with the deposits from my dad's store.

(The interview ended at Younger's office.)

G: Thank you! It's been a great experience.

Y: You're welcome. I hope it'll be helpful.



Betty Younger, Milton Younger, and their daughters

Epilogue

For nearly 50 years Milt Younger was President of Henrietta Weill Child Guidance Clinic, President of the Weill Foundation, and president of Bakersfield Symphony Orchestra. He chaired the \$180M Bakersfield College bond issue, served on the Board of Visitors of Stanford Law School, and is Chairman of the Center for Kern Political Education. In 2001 he received the Consumer Attorneys of California Presidential Award of Merit for protecting the civil justice system. In 2002 he received CAC's Award of Merit for commitment in advancing the rights of California consumers. He has served as a trustee of the California State College System. In 2000 Younger was awarded the Bench and Bar Award of the Kern County Bar Association. In 2000 he was recipient of an honorary doctorate from California State

University, Bakersfield. In 1990 he had received Person of the Year and Lifetime Achievement awards from the Kern County Democratic Party. Younger was on the founding board of California State College, Bakersfield, was a commencement speaker for the College, and was named Outstanding Friend of the University. He received Person of the Year and Lifetime Achievement awards from the Kern, Inyo, and Mono County Central Labor Council and from the Building Trades Council. Younger has received awards from the California Teachers Association, the Black American Political Association, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and the Kern County Sikh Community, among other charitable and educational organizations. Younger was awarded Commendatory Resolutions from the California Assembly and State Senate. He was a founding member of Trial Lawyers for Public Justice, and he pioneered Group Legal Services in Kern County that provides free legal consultations and reduced attorney fees to members of groups it represents. Younger is a pioneer member of the California Trial Lawyer Association, and he served on their Board of Governors and Executive Committee. Younger is a supporter of Habitat for Humanity.

Some information here is from my visits with the Youngers between 2008 and 2010, but most of it comes from the lunch talks and the single neighborhood tour.

Don Clark's interview of Milt and Betty Younger inspired me to write this interview. My desire was to identify the precursors of success in Milt Younger's life, and to that end he was gracious, patient, and helpful. But it was also important to him that I understand his commitment to philanthropy and social justice. When asked why those are so fundamental to him, he answered me in much the same as he answered Don Clark: People are put here to help their fellow man. Milt Younger the Godfather of Democratic politics in Kern County lives that ideal. So many times I've heard him say, "What can I do for you?"

Quatrain for Milton Younger on his Birthday

Thinning hair and whitening beard
Mark the years' velocity,
Yet carries still the strength of youth
The Godfather of Democracy.

Newer laurels, often raised
Challenged old bureaucracy,
Brave his word, sharp his sword
The Godfather of Democracy.

He tracked within the legal wild
For forms of inequality,
Bad men paled, good men hailed
The Godfather of Democracy.

Tables filled with all true friends
Discussing party policy,
And youth beguiled by his life-style
The Godfather of Democracy.

Generous thought and measured words
Brought fight against hypocrisy,
Hearfelt cheers we give to him
The Godfather of Democracy.

-Gil Gia, July 2015

*Milt,
With all best wishes
for a most happy birthday!
Gil Gia*

< 0 >