



# RESIDENT OF THE MONTH

*Mel Sinn*

Born on February 12, 1931, in southeastern Nebraska, Mel's life journey is a rich tapestry of resilience, dedication, and adventure. The son of Loren and Maybel Sinn, Mel grew up during the Great Depression on a farm, developing a strong work ethic early on. Alongside his younger brother William, Mel undertook adult responsibilities such as milking cows, harvesting wheat, and shucking corn by hand. These formative years instilled a profound sense of responsibility and resourcefulness.

Mel's educational journey began in a one-room schoolhouse near his home, where he completed eight years of schooling. He graduated from Alexandria High School in 1948 in a class of just 16 students. As a teenager, Mel thrived in 4-H, raising livestock and achieving notable successes, including winning a state fair grand championship with a Poland China boar named Boy. His accomplishments earned him a scholarship to the University of Nebraska's agricultural college, but he soon realized agriculture was not his calling. In a bold move, he left college and began a new chapter in Lincoln, holding various jobs and meeting Jinny, the high school girl who would later become his wife.

In 1951, Mel was drafted for military service. Choosing the Air Force over the Marines, he began basic training in San Antonio, Texas, where he bonded with Jerry Van Dyke, who nicknamed him "It's No" after the popular song It's No Sin.

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Mel's military career led him to cryptographic school, where he trained in encoding and decoding messages. After completing his training, Mel took a 30-day leave during which he became engaged to Jinny. Orders then took him to Hawaii, where he served at Hickam Air Force Base for three years. Mel's time in Hawaii was marked by unique experiences, including an encounter with John Wayne when he tripped over him on Waikiki Beach and brief meetings with celebrities like Frank Sinatra and Rita Hayworth.

In 1954, Mel and Jinny married, beginning a life filled with love and adventure. They initially lived near Waikiki Beach, where Jinny worked as a dress shop saleswoman and model, and Mel became deeply involved in their local church. Their twin sons, Mark and Mike, were born in 1955, shortly before the family returned to Nebraska. Back home in 1959 daughter Leian was born, Mel also pursued journalism as a radio news reporter and disk jockey while attending junior college. Later, the family moved to Hastings, Nebraska, where Mel earned a bachelor's degree and served as an interim pastor in Doniphan. In 1968, Mel completed his graduate studies at Iliff School of Theology in Denver and began a new chapter as a campus minister at Indiana State University in Terre Haute. At ISU, Mel founded "The Attic," a successful coffeehouse and community hub offering worship services, Bible studies, and other activities.

His passion for community engagement extended to his work as the director of Community Action, overseeing multiple federal programs. During this time, he unwittingly hired Larry Eyler, later discovered to be a serial killer—a chilling footnote in an otherwise impactful career.

In 1981, Mel's life took a new turn. He and Jinny divorced, and in 1986, he met Lucia Kaiser, a nutrition director at Union Hospital. They married in 1988, embarking on a life of travel and exploration. Together, they visited 14 countries, with Greece and Italy among their favorites. Mel also continued his ministry, hosting a radio program called "Angels on Angels" and serving as an interim pastor. A chance meeting with musician Harry Chapin led to a conversation that inspired Chapin's unfinished song, "A Preacher Called Sinn."

After retiring in 1998, Mel and Lucia spent 17 winters in South Padre Island, Texas, relishing their time together. In 2023, a health challenge for Lucia brought them to Westminster Village for therapy. Initially renting a room to stay close to her, Mel discovered a vibrant community of friends and exceptional care for Lucia. By December 2024, they decided to make Westminster their permanent home, finding it the perfect place to enjoy their golden years.

Today, Mel and Lucia are surrounded by a supportive community and staff at Westminster. With two sons in Terre Haute, a daughter in Kentucky, and a growing family that includes two grandchildren and two great-grandchildren, Mel's life remains full of love and connection. Reflecting on his journey, he emphasizes the warmth and care they've received, affirming, "Westminster is where we should be."

Mel's legacy is also preserved in his memoir, "A Preacher Called Sinn," available in the Westminster library. From his humble beginnings on a Nebraska farm to a life of service, adventure, and community impact, Mel's story is a testament to resilience, faith, and the enduring power of human connection.