

## **Matie Daiber - Personal Communication**

**Taped interview, 17 July 2001**

**Accompanied by Joanne Daiber**

**At Matie Daiber's home in Juanita, Washington**

**by Lowell Skoog**

Ome Daiber was born George C. Daiber in 1907. He later changed his name legally to Ome. The name Ome is from his boyhood, when he asked a friend at school to "owe me a nickel" so he could buy some lunch. Ome and Matie were married in 1940. At the time of our meeting Matie was 91. Joanne is their older daughter. Their younger daughter is Gretchen. Matie Daiber was in the Spokane Mountaineers before she moved to Seattle. Joanne remembered, "She won some ski races! Because she made it down the mountain!" Matie said, "If you didn't fall, you won the race. That was in 1936-37." We spent considerable time looking through old scrapbooks, photographs and equipment. Matie also showed me paintings in the Daiber house by Dee Molenaar and Clark Schurman.

Joanne recalled an early climbing story about her father. "One of Ome's first conquests was the roof of his house. He climbed up the down-spout." Matie remembered, "His mother almost fainted when she saw him." Joanne continued, "He climbed up the down-spout somehow and then he did a swing. He had one hand on the gutter and one hand on the down-spout and he did a swing and up and over as his mother came around the corner, and she screamed as he was going--you know, the best thing for a mother to do."

### **Equipment Design**

Ome was introduced to the mountains by the Boy Scouts. He was an assistant scout master at age 15. The scout leader had to be out of town a lot, so Ome pretty much took over the troop. He started designing and making his own equipment to save money. He operated the Boy Scout trading post to provide equipment and supplies for Scouts. Later he leased space in the Eddie Bauer store for his Hike Shack. Matie referred me to *The Legend of Eddie Bauer* ([specter-1994](#)).

Ome ran Ome Daiber, Inc. after the Hike Shack, making and selling equipment. One of Ome's early inventions was the Penguin sleeping bag, which enabled the user to "get up without getting out of bed." Matie recalled that Ome started making Penguins early in the 1930s. She modelled her Penguin for me, which she got in 1940. It had two stubby legs with ties around the ankles, arms with drawstrings at the wrists, an insulated hood, a waist belt, and a little picture of a penguin on the back. The crotch was low so you could pull one foot up and put your feet together. Matie showed me a letter from Admiral Richard Byrd, dated 17 December 1936, praising the Penguin. Matie said that when the war started you couldn't buy down, so that was the end of the Penguin. It was heavy, and lighter materials came along later.

Other Ome Daiber inventions included Bird Cage crampons (lightweight, made of round metal stock welded together), the Pac-Jacket, and Sno-Seal. Ome manufactured Eddie Bauer's first down jackets and patented the Trigger Finger mitten, an invention later claimed by the U.S. army. He developed a rucksack that was copied by the army, but Matie said, "They wrecked it. They took the way it hung on the back and they fouled it up and it wasn't comfortable. It was a wonderful pack, I could carry 40 lbs, no problem." Matie said that Ome made early crampons with front points. "He was wearing them, I think, before anybody else around here." Matie showed me the "Dopfer hook" (a complex looking rope descender) which Ome may

have worked on. The word Dopfersicherung was stamped on the metal. She allowed me to borrow and copy a fascinating booklet full of Ome's patents and unpatented inventions ([ocd-inventions](#)).

After World War II began, Ome partnered with Harry Jensen in the Daiber-Jensen Company. Stan Sayres put money into it. Jensen had previously been a salesman for Sayres. Down was reserved for military production only and was unavailable for civilian use. So Daiber-Jensen developed an insulation called "Jensolite" which was used in sleeping bags. Ome would spend nights in a freezer to test it.

Ome left Daiber-Jensen during the war to develop cold weather equipment for the military. He had crushed his foot in a mountaineering accident when he was younger (I never understood exactly when this happened) so he was 4-F and could not join the army. He worked at Wright Field in Ohio for six months developing equipment. Matie thought he probably developed a lot of things used by the mountain troops, but she didn't recall specifics. She showed me a letter from Brig. Gen. S.B. Buckner (in charge of Alaskan defense) describing equipment requirements for mountain troops in winter.

After the war, Ome got out of equipment manufacturing and became a home-builder. Joanne said he needed to be doing physical work for health reasons. He built the Daiber home (where we met) and homes for Ira Spring and Tom Hornbein. Joanne remembered, "Tom Hornbein has bits of Ome's fingers in his foundation." This was literally true, due to an accident with a table saw. Later, Ome struggled with adult-onset diabetes, which settled in his feet. This was not caused by his crushed foot, said Joanne, but it eventually required amputation of his legs.

## Mountain Rescue

When Delmar Fadden was lost on Mt Rainier in the winter 1936, the authorities called Ome for help because of his Rainier experience, having made the first ascent of Liberty Ridge the previous September. As a result of this rescue operation, Ome became the go-to man for mountain rescues for many years thereafter. Calls would come to the Daiber house, then Matie and Ome would call a list of their mountaineering friends to help. Ome was therefore a key player when the Mountain Rescue Council was founded in the late 1940s. Matie showed me Ome's MRC scrapbook ([ocd-mrc-scrapbook](#)) containing newspaper clippings about accidents and MRC members from the 1950s.

Ome was an early member of the National Ski Patrol at Stevens Pass. During World War II, the Ski Patrol worked in cooperation with the War Department to map mountainous areas for aircraft rescue and civil defense. Dwight Watson, Dorrell Loeff, Ome and others went out every weekend and mapped different areas. Different men were assigned to each area of the Cascades. Matie recalled that they had a stack of maps in their house at one time. During the war, tires, oil and gas were all rationed so if you had a car break down during one of these mapping trips, you really had to limp home.

I asked about an incident during the war when a bomber went down in the mountains carrying live bombs and Ome was called to recover the crew. Matie said this occurred in the Olympic Mountains. Joanne said the military told Ome how to defuse the bombs. Matie said Hank Seidelhuber could provide a first-hand account of that recovery. The military sent men who were experts in such operations and Ome and Hank went along to provide mountaineering experience. They approached the plane, which was on a steep hillside. According to Matie, the military men "couldn't handle it. [Poor] shoes and the whole thing. So Hank and Ome did the defusing of the bomb."

Ome got some army surplus skis after World War II, trimmed them down, and skied on them. He always bored a hole near the tip so he could fasten the skis together if necessary. "He did that early," recalled Matie. She remembered a trip on Mt Rainier that was typical of Ome. He and Matie were skiing together, just the

two of them, when they heard somebody calling for help. They investigated and found a lady who said her friend or husband had been skiing and had broken his leg. Ome took some long thongs and bound the tips of his skis together using the pre-drilled holes. He made a toboggan this way, padding it with whatever they had. "We put him on there and Ome splinted him as much as he could," recalled Matie. "We used whatever we had, ski poles I guess. So with that, I remember, I carried a whole armful of skis and poles and stuff and the two of them (Ome and the woman skier) brought the man down. I wore a bandana, and had others in my pack, and those became the ties for the splint."

Matie and Joanne recommended *Mountain Rescues* by Helen Orlob but did not recommend *Mountain Rescues with Ome Daiber* by Richard D. Meyer (privately published in 1966) due to inaccuracies. Matie said she had videotapes of two Bob & Ira Spring films, *Mountains Don't Care* and *Skiing Above the Clouds* ([spring-movies](#)). I later borrowed these videos from her and still later obtained copies of the films from the Ira Spring family to transfer them to digital videotape.

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