

Jim Maynard lived a life of adventure

'Tiny' founded mounted search-and-rescue unit

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Jim Maynard was extra-large. So large, in fact, that for the entirety of his adult life he was known as Big Jim Maynard.

And Jim Maynard was indeed very big. His stature was variously reported as about 6'6" tall and some 300 pounds of solid muscle. But it wasn't just his physical size that made Jim Maynard a giant. His wild adventures and kind demeanor made him larger than life.



Maynard

Jim Maynard came to Palm Springs from Oregon at the age of 6 in 1923, with his family in search for a remedy for his sister's tuberculosis. His friend Frank Bogert recalled, "The Maynard family was poor by any standard. There were four boys who always seemed to need new shoes. Like his brothers, Jim got a new pair of shoes once every four years."

Jim worked as a local guide by the age of 12 and would take hotel guests on horseback rides, weaving tales of Indian legends, often giving the stories happy endings and elaborating as he thought necessary.

Bogert, who had no difficulty telling a good story, noted that "the legends he passed along were told so often they became fact and are told even now 'in the Maynard manner.'"

He roamed the canyons with his friends Pablo Siva and Joe Patencio, rounding up wild horses left by early California explorers. Pedro Chino told him secrets. Lily Mike taught him to imitate rabbit mating calls to facilitate their capture for dinner.

Katherine Finchy, his schoolteacher, remembered his early years: "Jim liked to slip away from school and run up into the canyon. Jim loves those mountains;

he's up there, he's learning a lot — about the shrubs, the trees and streams. He got a marvelous education that wasn't in books."

Jim skipped most days of school, instead learning the ways and language of the Agua Caliente and the wild terrain of the mountains. At age 18, he founded the first search-and-rescue group that would go on to become the Palm Springs Mounted Police Search and Rescue Team.

His wedding announcement in 1939 in *The Desert Sun* noted Maynard was employed at Deep Well Guest Ranch. "He is one of the popular young men in the village and is best known for the excellent work he has done in the Rescue Club."

He would go on to join the police force and serve in the Navy. The newspaper ever after was peppered with all manner of stories about him and his amazing rescues, daring arrests or civic good deeds.

The paper covered a 1955 tribute dinner. "Tiny' Jim Maynard ... is known to most everybody here in Palm Springs. He is remembered to this day by old-timers as boy and man who searched every hidden trail in the mountain fastness of San Jacinto range. It is even said that every wild thing that prowls amid the pines and the jungle of giant boulders that festoon the rugged mountains, knew the form and figure of both the boy (who played hooky from school) and the man when he led searching parties to succor the unwary, helplessly lost in the canyons beneath the snow covered peaks of Mt. San Jacinto ... Jim Maynard helped to organize the Palm Springs Mounted Police composed of civic minded citizens who on many occasions leave their businesses and jobs to search for some luckless individual, lost in the maze of mountain trails and facing possible death in a fall from smoothly eroded boulders on the mountainside."

Described as a climbing genius, who scampered up and down the mountainside scouting the route for the aerial tramway on foot. He developed a light-



Big Jim Maynard caught many a bobcat with his bare hands. PALM SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Jim Maynard "never had a harsh word for anyone — always a kind word and a smile."

George Aquino

weight stretcher for mountain rescues, small enough to be packed up into the size of a golf bag and then deployed to rescue the wayward hiker, who had succumbed to the terrain.

Dr. Dick Roger recounts that in the 1940s Maynard had a tungsten mine high above Palm Springs. He built a small cabin up there. "He bought a large generator to facilitate the mining. He then made a large Y shaped device and put the generator on it, attaching the front part to two mules. He hoisted the rear part over his shoulder. Halfway up what is now known as the Maynard Mine Trail, he developed severe chest pain and stopped and rested for two days. He then moved the generator up to the mine where it rests to this day. It has to weigh over 1,000 lbs."

Years later cardiologist Dr. Roger would take care of Maynard and could see the evidence of the heart attack suffered during that excursion.

In 1947, he cornered and captured a wildcat that attacked a 14-year-old girl at a south side hotel. Thought to have been rabid, the cat wasn't the first Maynard had subdued. He became famous in the retelling of the story in a CBS national broadcast.

An April 1949 newspaper article featured Maynard again. "Big Jim Maynard again was the better man in a tussle with a wildcat. Maynard scorns the use of man-made weapons in encounters with wildcats. He chased this one and caught it by the hind legs. Not so long ago he broke into the news with another bare-handed victory over an untame pussy. Once he astounded a ring of spectators who stood well back, while he reached into a trash can, where a wildcat was believed lurking ...and came up with a wriggling squirrel. In between bouts with wild animals, he corrals squirrel food as a member of the police force."

There are stories of him wrestling no mere bobcat, but an actual mountain lion. He left eight assailants on the floor in a bar room brawl in Banning. He investigated the first murder in Palm Springs. He was a pilot, a good friend of Frank Bogert, became a city inspector, went to mine uranium for Ray Ryan in Utah, and gold in Montana.

Melba Bennett, the founder of the Palm Springs Historical Society, and owner of Deep Well Ranch where Maynard had once worked, cajoled the extra-large policeman into playing Santa Claus for the town. Distributing presents to hundreds of school children in the valley was a job for which he was perfectly suited and sized.

In 1981, George Aquino lamented his friend's untimely death at age 63, noting that he was fully accepted into the Agua Caliente Cahuilla culture and spoke their language, saying he was a big guy, "and never had a harsh word for anyone — always a kind word and a smile." Surely a very big smile.