By 1981 Ruth Meyer was among a select group of women to have become a successful major-market air personality, radio station PD and network programmer.

In the United States during the 1950s, a woman who wanted to program a radio station couldn’t get arrested. But there was an exception. Her name was Ruth Meyer.

Meyer lived in Kansas City. She was 18 and wanted to be a newspaper reporter, but newspapers only gave jobs to those with experience. So, in desperation, she started picking local radio stations for a job. Destiny intervened when KCKX hired Meyer as a continuity writer. She was also allowed to pick music.

Todd Storz was in his 20s then. When he came to Kansas City to run the station he’d just bought, WHB, he heard about Meyer and offered her a job. People (real men) who were established in radio laughed at the idea of playing 40 records, but the disciples of Storz and Gordon McLendon knew better. In 1958, at the urging of WGMG/New York talent Peter Trupp, Meyer went to New York. WGMG management didn’t get the fundamentals of Top 40, and after three months Meyer accepted a job across town at WMC.

Her title was Production Director, but she did everything a PD does. “Everyone used to ask, ‘Who’s really programming the station?’” she says. “I didn’t think of myself as a woman program director, but as a programmer.” Bob Shannon told her that Chuck Blore, the PD at KFWB/Los Angeles, was using a line on the air that she should know about: Blore was calling the KFWB aircraft “The Good Guys.”

“I wanted to use the phrase on WMC. But my boss thought it was a dumb idea,” Meyer says. Despite her boss’s objections, she started to use The Good Guys on the air and to build a team around the name. Despite their skepticism, the WMC Good Guys played along and found out that being a team worked.

The team had the same haircut, dressed alike and showed everywhere together. Ruth even wrote a song called “We’re the Good Guys” that the station played. Did she get any recognition? “None whatsoever,” she says. “I got my kicks from watching it all happen.”

In 1968 Meyer left WMC and consulted Radio Luxembourg and Radio Caroline, stations that defined radio for England and Western Europe in the late ’60s. In 1973 she took on a new challenge: WGMG/New York had been middle of the road, but the plan was to change the call letters to WHN and change the format. “I didn’t like Country,” Meyer says. “In fact, when I found out, I quit.” But when she overheard someone in the sales department complaining, “Country will never work in New York,” she changed her mind and agreed to stay for a year.

As she’d done at WMC, Meyer stayed behind the scenes and built her team. After WHN she went to WNEW for a short time, where she worked with a sales guy named Mel Karmazin, and then returned to WMC to lead its new Talk format. That’s where she discovered Sully Jexx Raphael. In 1978 Meyer was named VP/Programming at the NBC Radio Network and was instrumental in creating the Source. “We did concerts and even created a program called Sex, Drugs and Rock and Roll,” she says. “That drove NBC management bananas.”

Today Meyer lives in Kansas City and has trouble listening to radio. “I always want to fix the problems I hear,” she says. “So I listen to Sports radio, because I don’t know anything about it.”