

**Oral History Interview of
Max Evans**

**Interviewed by: Andy Wilkinson
March 19, 2015
Albuquerque, New Mexico**

**Part of the:
*Crossroads of Music Archive***

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The Crossroads Artists Project encompasses interviews conducted by the Crossroads of Music Archive Staff members. They hope to document the creative process of artists and songwriters from all across the Southwestern United States.

Transcript Overview:

This interview is a continuation of an interview Wilkinson began with Evans the previous day. Evans focuses primarily on his relationship with painter Woody Crumbo: their mutual love of art, the Southwest, and their mining business partnership.

Length of Interview: 02:21:04

Subject	Transcript Page	Time Stamp
Family relations to Dolona Roberts	5	00:00:00
Woody Crumbo and his influence on Max	7	00:04:20
Peyote experience leading to novella	11	00:18:17
Excavating mines outside Taos	13	00:26:05
Uranium boom in 1950s New Mexico	17	00:37:00
Taos Uranium and Exploration Company	20	00:47:00
End of Company, becoming Taos Minerals, Solar Metals	26	01:01:10
Fallout and Lawsuit Taos Minerals	29	01:11:15
More adventures with Woody	31	01:17:25
Woody Max and Sonny Jim	35	01:30:49
Last meeting with Crumbo	38	01:39:25
Wrapping up, planning next interview	41	01:51:45
One last Woody Crumbo story	42	01:53:30
Reading Coffee Grounds	43	01:55:40
Planning next interview (again)	45	02:02:25
Crumbo biography	46	02:04:24
Crumbo's influence on Native American art	48	02:10:25

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Andy Wilkinson (AW):

Books later, and it said that his work is really hard to find copies of it now, and that there's a fairly high demand for it.

Max Evans (ME):

Which book is that?

AW:

The Troubling—

ME:

The Troubling of a Star.

AW:

Yeah, and then the one that most people like is his collection of fifty stories, and I think they must be science fiction and said that there's a real high demand for that book.

ME:

Well, I'll be danged. That's great.

AW:

Yeah, so that's what I was looking at on the web last night, trying to track.

ME:

That is wonderful to hear! Oh Lord, well, I'll be durned. Before we get into this, tell me about that—you said that Dolona Roberts, you visited somebody named—

AW:

Rocky Koberna [Roxanna "Rocky" Littlejohn Koberna]. Koberna's her married name. Well, in fact, she—this is really interesting, she just this very second, you heard that little bloopy noise? She just sent me a text message.

And that's what she sent me. I think that may be Woody's portrait of her mother. [referring to a photo sent via text message to AW at that moment]

ME:

I'll be durned. Her name's Littlejohn?

AW:

Yeah. And her mother's name was Rogers. They were all from the Rogers Ranch people at Tulia, Tule Canyon?

ME:

We know them, but we can't get it straight.

AW:

I'm sure you would know them, because there were, let me look at my notes and I'll tell you who else hung out in that batch. But Frank Ray taught, not this woman, this would be Jacque Littlejohn, J-a-c-q-u-e. And she would've—it was her mother—oh no, here, she, she thinks that this is her grandmother, she thinks this might be by Frank Ray, this portrait, not Woody; this is before that. But that doesn't look like a Frank Ray piece. He would've had her sitting in a chair by herself, not with a candle, that's a beautiful painting, that candle.

ME:

Well, I don't understand now—the connection, how she, if she knew Dolores, Dolona Roberts.

AW:

Let me get back to my notes from then.

Okay, her mother, Rocky's, is named Jacque Littlejohn, and Jacque's mother, so Rocky's grandmother is Priscilla Rogers. She, Priscilla, and Dolona were good friends in Taos. And then Jacque, of course, was a generation younger than them.

ME:

Was what?

AW:

Was a generation younger than them.

ME:

Yeah.

AW:

But still would go up and spend time with them, and got to know Dolona, and that's what—and I think it was through Dolona and Priscilla that both Jacque Littlejohn and Rocky got to know Woody and then Woody Max so well. Does that help clear it up?

ME:

Little bit. (laughs)

AW:

Well, next time I'm in town maybe I can arrange for Rocky to meet you and Pat, and she'll be able to fill it in probably with a lot more detail.

ME:

Yeah, yeah. I don't know why Pat was curious about—she remembered the name Littlejohn. We just couldn't tie it together; of course she knew Dolona real good.

AW:

Yeah.

ME:

And—okay, you ready to start to start on Woody Crumbo?

AW:

You bet. This is March 19, 2015—Max Evans, Andy Wilkinson in Max's home. I will add just because I'm a grandfather, this is also my granddaughter Pixel's sixth birthday.

ME:

(claps) Yay!

AW:

And she's painter, she's a drawer, she's really good, too.

ME:

I'll be darn. Wonderful.

AW:

She has a poor life ahead of her, doesn't she? (laughs) She would just die, every time we get around I bring by friends that are painters, she's captivated.

ME:

Yeah. Okay, well, I told you about waiting all day there in the Sagebrush Inn to meet Woody, and when he came in, I just walked towards him, and shook hands, and he just acted like he'd known me all his life, let's go in and have a beer. And we was having a beer, and I don't remember our conversation because it's—we were just checking one another out. We knew we were lifelong friends. But I do remember one thing he said. He said, "Well, I instantly knew you were from—that you've been to the land of shadows." And I never forgot that the rest of the night; that really hung with me all my life, and I never questioned him because I understood it

later. It's an indescribable thing that happens that happens between people who have Indian spiritual inclinations or blood, and it was—Woody was about thirty-nine, I believe, and I was in my—I think he was twelve years older than I was. And in some ways, I was older than him, and we didn't know it for a while. But our relationship started right off, his wife was teaching at the Indian Day School at Taos Pueblo, and that's where he lived, out at the Pueblo.

AW:

At the Pueblo?

ME:

Yeah. Out at the Pueblo. And Pat and I were just married, and we would go out and visit them there at their home in the Pueblo. Of course, he was acquainted with everybody in there, and old friends — and that's how I got acquainted with a lot of people at the Pueblo, which were friends all my life after that. But the main—so many things happened there, that painting right back over there on the wall, that moon he did it, an original there—Indian-style moon, steps of the moon. He did that one night, right there in the Pueblo. He saw the moon in it, and he and his wife took a walk, in the moonlight, there in the Pueblo, and he came back and painted that picture.

AW:

Wow.

ME:

And I don't even—it's in this book, a photograph of it's in this book, and I forget the name. You see the Indian symbols—the four seasons there. I'll get to the story on that painting later. But we go out and visit with them at the Pueblo, and it was a wondrous time. He was in a transition period in his life. Woody was an orphan. He'd been deserted there at Sand Springs, Oklahoma. His parents died then, but he'd been deserted. He lived as a little kid up and down that river there by Sand Springs, Oklahoma, and he just grew up wild. And a Kiowa family found him, and took him in, an old Kiowa family there. He was brilliant. They recognized that he was brilliant kid, and they got him in the schools. And then he went to Bacone College, the first of the Indian colleges, and the day he graduated they made him art director.

AW:

Really?

ME:

Yeah.

AW:

How do you spell Bacone?

ME:

B-a-c-o-n-e. And his career—his strange, wonderful, and wearied, sometimes terribly-diminished-career—started right there. He taught at various times at OU [University of Oklahoma]. But he became noted right then—besides his paintings which he just could do—he became the world's greatest eagle dancer. He was a very handsome man. He was recognized by all different tribes in America as the world's greatest eagle dancer. They talked about him that way. And, in fact, he was adopted—he was Potawatomi blood, actually—but he was adopted by the Kiowas, the Lakota Siouxs, the Creeks. He married a Creek woman; he wife is Indian. She was a beautiful Creek. He was very handsome, he married a beautiful Creek woman, and consequently, they had these two beautiful children, which we'll get into later, Minisa and Woody Max—like most people thought in those days is he'd named him after me, but he hadn't; he already named him.

AW:

Really?

ME:

Yeah.

AW:

That's interesting

ME:

Yeah, that is. And so we had all these things together, and he just automatically became my mentor, and he knew that he that—he could see that I had already had a sense of design. So what he set about teach me and my art, before we got into all these other businesses together, was how to do it, use a palette knife.

AW:

Really?

ME:

Yeah. And he showed me. He didn't just teach me, he showed me with a palette knife. And I was already doing moonlights, but I wasn't using the palette, and once I was using the palette, I started—he also, he'd go against the rules. In those days, if you went to a big art instructor back east or somewhere—Chicago Art Institute or whatever, they would tell you that you couldn't use a brush and a palette knife—and that's the first thing he said. He said, "See? They actively

complement one another.” I don’t know where that came from. So that released me where I could combine a brush and a palette knife, and I was just really getting good at it when I started off on these other deals, writing and all that silly stuff. But just beginning to know where I was going. I thought, “Hell, a year from now I’ll have it, I’ll really have it.” I knew it. But anyway, we had horses—strange spiritual things together. Right off we were talking there at the Pueblo. And it never happened—what happened there never happened again for me. But I told him that story about my grandmother and my mother putting her hands on the table.

AW:

On the table? Uh huh.

ME:

Yeah, and the table being lifted, and it just came up there in Texas, at Morton, Texas—at their home. I told you about that. And so I said, “Well, the hell, let’s just try it.” (laughs) “See if I can do.” It worked!

AW:

It did?

ME:

Never tried it again, but he just, he knew, he already knew something. And I said, “I’m never going to do that again.” But he—then Pat gave me away, she didn’t know it, but she gave me away about the tea leaves and the coffee grounds,

AW:

And so?

ME:

so, he started on me to read coffee grounds. I did, and it was so—it just stunned him. Well, it stuns me that anybody’d be stunned I wasn’t paying, I was just doing these things. And it turned out that later on, when we started—he moved from the Pueblo into town. And then on the other side of town he got some land there, I don’t know how to describe what part of Taos that was, it was by Taos Creek, ran right through the edge of it. He had a big house and some beautiful land there, but we’ll get to that later. But he got to where he’d drive all the way into town, and then he’d—two or three miles out where we lived, old rut roads—he’d drive almost every day out there. He got it for me to read tea leaves, and it weren’t just for him, he just wanted to see what I’d come up with. It got to where he was interrupting my work (both laughs)—so, but I’ll give you an example of things.

One time we were sitting there in that little old house, I guess you could call it a ranch house, we built and rebuilt it with adobes and everything. But Pat and I and Woody we were setting there, and I was reading his tea leaves—coffee grounds—it might have been tea leaves by then, I don't remember. Didn't matter, it's the same thing, it's just a method of concentrating the spirits. But—I said, "Oh, I see three owls! Three owls, sitting side by side." And Pat said, "Look right out the back window." And right out the back window, on the fence, was three owls sitting there. Now, how—you can't make this up, you know? You can't invent that, that happened.

AW:

Not only that, owls aren't—and, plus they're not gregarious, they don't do that. I mean, typically, you don't see three owls.

ME:

Not in daylight (laughs). In mid-day it's—so he looked around there and he said, he made a motion like this [waves his hand], and they just screeched and went off; screeched, all of them, and just took off. And I said, "What did you do?" And he said, "I twisted the tail-feather. So they'd." (laughs) Now, I know how this sounds, I don't care. That happened. Just like that. Over and over, things. And then I told, I'd go down and, every time we'd get plumb broke and want to improve our little old home there -- we built a living room, old Luz Martinez helped us to add a living room to it, fireplace there at home there. Then we didn't have any big windows you know; so I found out that the old Taos Gallery down on Pueblo Road had two big windows they were taking out with, they were old-fashioned but they were picture windows. So they just exactly fit. And so I went down and got in the crap game again and won enough money to buy those windows. (laughs) That's the—you couldn't always get a crap game. It just—

AW:

(laughs) Well, especially if you won all the time, who wanted you to play? (both laughs)

ME:

I was using John Dunn's dice, if you know— So anyway, we just became closer and closer and he took me on trips to the Kiowas, met with the medicine man there. He was honored; you can't hardly believe how he was honored. We went off there, the chief of the medicine men there at, oh, what's the name—Anadarko—and out in the brush there, and they made medicine. I never did know what kind of medicine they made there, I just kind of walked off and let the two of them—and I had all those experiences with him.

He got me the first peyote I ever even heard of, I guess; he got some there from Anadarko. They said, "You will try this. It's just one experience; it's not addictive or anything like that." So I said, "I'll try that, yeah, I'll try it." And I had Pete—by then I'd become good friends with one of the great medicine men that'd ever been, Joe Bernal, in Taos Pueblo. It had been handed down a

thousand years. I'll tell you how that ended later. But anyway I went out and got his approval, and I said, "How do I do this?" And he just showed me how you just eat that little old bud thing, and he said, "You don't know how it'll affect you. Just do one and do it by yourself." So I didn't know what to do. And I told Pat; I went out to our little ranch out there, and I told her, "Go shopping or something, go grocery shopping. I'm going to lie down here on the bed, and I'm going to eat this peyote. I'm scared of what I might do so I just, I don't want anybody around." Of course it didn't— no violence, no nothing, but I had a vision that led to my most reprinted story.

AW:
Really?

ME:
Yeah. I looked up and— at first it made me sick.

AW:
Yeah, that's—I've been offered it several times, and every time I think, "I don't want to be sick in front of people."

ME:
Just don't bother, because it'll just make you sick, and you'll just have some kind of vision. But this vision was valuable to me. Because that was right after Mr. Bernal had made the decision, Joe Bernal, he asked me, said "You have tendencies of a medicine man. Do you want to be a medicine man or an artist?" And I said, "I want to be an artist." So that's when he approved me taking this. He had some kind of vision, because I looked up at—all of a sudden I looked at the wall over there, and there was, like a motion picture, just a vision there. And in brilliant colors, and it was a great river—you could see the bottom of it, you just see sand all [over] the river, just beautiful white sand, and I looked at that dern river, emerald-type-colored river, long river, and these great, great trees just went so high I couldn't see the tops. And there was three suns beaming through there. And a guy came that just—I don't know how to explain what kind of clothes he was in, he just had some clothes on, I don't—he came walking slowly up to that riverbank there. He looked at me and motioned me, like this: "C'mon, c'mon." And I was real tempted, everything was so beautiful, and I was really tempted to go there. And I didn't. And I just held back, and somehow, I was telling him, I can't do this; I'm not ready for whatever it is. I was mentally projecting that.

And later that led to a novella. This scene I've just described to you led to a novel called "Candles in the Bottom of a Pool." And it became part of that story. And that became, so far in my life, it's been the most reprinted of all my novellas. It's been [in] many anthologies. Two different producers—Sam Peckinpah's nephew and a guy from Canada -- tried to option it for

movie, and they couldn't, I never would sign an option with them, I was worried. Even though I needed the money, until they described to me how they were going to do it. And I said, "How are you going to do this in Canada?" Because I really liked that Canadian guy. And he said, "Well, I'm just going to change the sand, the desert part, into snow. The whole rest of it would be the same." I said, "Well, I guess you can do that, that's not enough." So finally I took that story, I just found one copy I've got left of the first printing by the University of *South Dakota Review*, which at that time was most noted—oddly enough, the most noted literary journal in America was that little journal there at the University of South Dakota. It brought Frank Waters back to life, all kind of—

AW:
Really?

ME:
Really. He was gone. And it was all because of an editor named John R. Milton. He was a great editor, and he published the greatest literature. *New York Magazine* even said—I used to have a copy of it—they said, "Surprisingly, the finest"—they called them small magazines, little magazines in those days—"is from a little university up in South Dakota." They first published it; so I took that story and I found it the other day. In ink I had broken down exactly how to do the script.

AW:
Oh really?

ME:
Yeah. And I was planning to take time to show it, have David Peckinpah come out here and look at that breakdown, and then, if he understood it, I was going to deal with him, and let him make it into a film. Well, as we all know about film things, the writers of any kind, you finally find out it's so unpredictable that it just seems to be pure luck in the end.

AW:
Yeah.

ME:
But that all came about, all this is happening, and I'm, because of Woody Crumbo and my grandmother, the combination of the two influences are happening. His life was changed completely by us meeting, as mine was. But I tell you, we had a strange and wonderful rapport. We'll get to his kids later, but the little kids, Minisa and Woody Max, they were just like their mother and father. Those two beautiful Indian people; they got two beautiful children. And it was a drawback for these kids their entire life.

AW:

Because they were so pretty?

ME:

Yeah, it really was. It just, it looked they were blessed but they weren't. But we had so many adventures that I can't even recall them. A lot of them spiritual, a lot of them real. And then finally, I was always interested in minerals and the earth. And I got to talking to an old, old prospector there in Taos, old Elmer Birch. And he said, "There's some old copper mines that were real rich way up Taos Canyon on Bull of the Woods Mountain. And I said, "Well, just for the heck of it, let's go up there." He said, "Oh, well, we can't even ride a horse," he said— (coughs) excuse me, please—"The trail has been washed out so that we just have to, maybe we can lead the mule up there." I said, "We'll let's go, we'll just to take us a lunch and pack and go." So we made it up there—12,800 feet, that mountain there.

AW:

Wow! That's a climb.

ME:

Right on down the ridge is the highest point in the peter-pickin' state. Well, I found I knew enough about minerals that I knew there was chalcopyrite—very rich copper samples—there and you could see where there was an old tunnel and dug—I didn't know how to judge the depth by the ore dump, I got to where I could quite well. But he said, "I think this'd be about fifty feet deep." But all of sudden I thought, "Well, I'll be, somehow, how am I going to open that up?" And he said, "Well, Woody knows a bunch of Indians, and I know some, and you know some. Let's just get Indians and come up here and camp, and we'll all just camp up here and open that tunnel up." And he'd been a miner. He knew how to do all that timber and all that stuff. So we just got everything packed and Woody didn't go, but me and old Elmer and eight or nine Indians went. It was just a tremendous adventure, that time up there. I don't know why, I took a thirty-thirty, and that was the only one, I went out and killed a deer. From then on the Indians loved me. And I killed a deer, and we had it at night, we'd sit around and they'd tell one another stories, it was a grand old fire.

AW:

Oh, I bet it was.

ME:

We had deer, and all day we'd work like hell, and I didn't dig on that damn tunnel. I got so excited looking after these different veins up there, discovering, and just actually giving myself lessons in mineralogy. It was all coming fast to me; I could just— it was just natural thing. But it

was eight or nine days of just grand, grand adventure, and they got that tunnel open under his direction, got it all—

AW:

Shored it up?

ME:

Yeah, yeah, and they cut the timber to brace it up with and where it was safe to walk back in there, all that worked, and back in the end of that tunnel was about a eighteen-inch vein of that rich ore, slanting there. Well what I didn't know—and he didn't know either, nobody knew-- that ore had pockets up there, those veins were rich, but the whole range right in there had been fractured.

AW:

So you would go along the vein and run right into just plain rock.

ME:

Yeah.

AW:

That'd be a disappointment.

ME:

And then it took too much money to dig it out.

AW:

To go sideways.

ME:

But we didn't know that. We formed a company and everything else. And we had geologists who didn't quite understand that. And we formed a mining company. And the ore— we had top geologists, we hired two away from the Atomic Energy Commission, Melvin Swanson and, oh god, I can't think of the one, he was from here, he was a great geologist. I'll think of his name later I guess. But Melvin Swanson was the guy who discovered the first uranium mine; it was publicized all over the world.

AW:

Really?

ME:

Yeah. He was working for the Atomic Energy Commission in Moab, Utah. And he went into those mountains there, and he found this rich deposit of uranium. Well, he was supposed to come back and report this into the Atomic Energy Commission. Well, on the way back, he met a prospector, I can't think of his name, but he the most famous mining guy in the world at the time, because of what I'm fixing to tell you. They met; he's going up, prospecting, and he's already found this, he's going back. And they met, and they stayed at the campfire all night. They got to visiting, and, oh God, that guy's name, everybody knew it, it was in the papers all over the damn world.

AW:
The prospector?

ME:
Yeah. This guy discovered—it was Melvin Swanson who discovered it, but the guy who got the credit, and got the mine was this other guy whose name I can't think of, but you can look it up in the papers or somewhere. It'll come to me.

AW:
Yeah.

ME:
Anyway, he had a bottle of scotch.

AW:
Uh-oh. (laughs)

ME:
In his pack and everything, and they started drinking that scotch, and old Melvin just told him where that durn mine was, and it hit all the papers and he became an instant millionaire up there in Moab. It was a hell of thing. Well, Melvin got fired. Somehow they found out that this couldn't be, you know? And so, you know, me and old Woody Crumbo hired him. But then he recommended another geologist who worked that country up there with us, who's here, and I can't think of his name, but he had a great reputation and, in fact, you've got some of his papers, both of them, in your collection at Texas Tech now, that are from UTEP [University of Texas at El Paso].

AW:
Oh, the stuff we picked up there?

ME:

The stuff in there about the mining and these two guys. So then Woody got involved, and we decided we'd form a company—(coughs) excuse me—and we'd sell stock and mine that ore. Two geologists wrote reports, and they were good reports. We found an old report, handwritten, back the 1890s, of that area. The only thing is, they didn't know how fractured it was. There was fractures. Later on, right above the ski lodge, we opened up a tunnel thirteen-hundred and eighty feet, just across from that Taos ski lodge. Well, it's becoming one of the most famous in the world now. We found this dump up there, and it was a big dump, so we knew it was deep. And it opened up, old Elmer the prospector, really knew about this, but he didn't tell us, because he was living off the fat of the land, which is me and old Woody at the time. (AW laughs) About two hundred feet—it's a thirteen-hundred and eighty foot tunnel that they dug long ago into that Fraser Mountain there. And about two hundred feet into it, there was a fault line that just kept caving in and it always had. That's what stopped them.

AW:

Because you knew it was going to cave in at some point.

ME:

Yeah. And we'd timber it and it'd still—it was—we tried everything. So, it became so danged dangerous we decided we'd go around on the other side of that Fraser Mountain and we opened up some really rich veins. Beautiful ore, just rainbow ored, just like holding the light of the rainbow, just beautiful copper. If I remember correctly, it'll be fairly accurate, that first tunnel, 1380 feet, assayed all the way through, somewhere around 240 to 260 percentage copper, which is getting to be pretty high grade, anything above, you know, they mine, sixty, seventy one-hundredths at these big, big mines, open pit mines. And that ore held all the way through there, but that fault just, I hired a miner back from the Hi-Lo Country. It was a guy that was my old hunting partner's brother who had mined in all over the country; he was Bob Crestwell. And he really knew mines, and he could handle miners, and that was the best hire we ever made. But he didn't understand that part of it either, that that whole country there is fractured as much as it was. And anyway, the assays would come back good, we brought the assays down here, and then we used Charlie Parker, who was at that time was the most famous assay man in the entire west, out of Denver. So we really had some great people involved. National, international reputations. So we decided, okay, just being two dumb artists, we decided we'd go to Santa Fe—where the uranium headquarters, a lot of people were headquartered in Santa Fe because of the big uranium boom is taking place, at Grants, over there—Grants, New Mexico, where they had all the big uranium mills and the whole world was interested in it. They came—

AW:

What year would this have been?

ME:

Ah, oh god, it'd be about, somewhere between 1950 and 1953, right in there.

AW:

Okay, real early.

ME:

It can all be tied by a historian to the—easily in just a few minutes to the uranium boom, and Grants is where they had the huge mills. And it was a Cold War starting, and everybody thought that that was going to be the next power, even it would take over oil. They had dreams that it just, condense a little bit of uranium—

AW:

Oh yeah. Well the reason I was asking is, my father had a good friend that worked at the oil mill with him, and he was a guy that's from California, but he was trained as a scientist, he was there at the oil mill to do their lab work and do that sort of thing. But he was a uranium fiend. He had Geiger counters and he would go off and take his vacations in Arizona, and walk around those dry washes, trying to find washed-down uranium, and hoping, the idea would be to track it back to where it came in. But I remember as a little kid, growing up, listening to him talk about uranium all the time. He had a Geiger counter, and he'd take a wristwatch and show us how, you know, it would start ticking.

ME:

Yeah, there's a photograph of old Woody Crumbo, standing in front of a famous painting he was doing in our mining office in Taos, New Mexico. And he's standing there with a scintillator, which is the most sensitive of all Geiger counters. Showing off, standing there in front of this big painting, great painting that he was just starting, right there in our office.

AW:

So you didn't give up art to do mining. At this point, at least, you were combining the two?

ME:

Yeah, I sort of combined them, but I finally gave it up for two or three years there. It got so big, it got out of our control. I jumped ahead of myself, because we were sitting there broke in a little motel and bar, drinking beer on the credit.

AW:

Where at? In Taos?

ME:

In Taos. I do remember the motel, it was called The Indian Hills. It might still be there in some form or other, just off the plaza toward the Santa Fe Highway, just off of the plaza and down that hill. And we were sitting there with an old cowboy named Marian Miner who cowboied, that's all he'd ever done. He'd done a little mining but didn't know much, but he knew how to stake claims. And another little cowboy, Shorty Kendricks, was running a bar. And he was selling me and old Woody beer on the credit. We were setting there with Miner, drinking on the credit. He came over there and said, "Hey boys, there's a guy here from Kansas City. He's got a geologist with him." And they come in here and I can overhear them talking, and he's got this geologist looking for uranium claims, says, "Y'all might want to talk to him," because he knew we was flat broke. And so, they came in in a couple hours, we just stayed. And we met them, and that guy asked me or Woody one, I don't remember which one he asked, if we knew where there was possibly any uranium. Well, we knew there was that Harding mine was up by Penasco, between Penasco and Dixon, south of Taos. We knew about that, that was a rare earth mine, lithium, and all kinds of things that they had mined during World War II—the rare earths just came out of it. We all knew about that because it was used to harden cannons. It was a rare earth that they had to have. So we just all lied like dogs. Said, "Oh, yeah, we know how to stake claims." I said, "Well, I think we know where there's some uranium." So I thought, "Well, there's got to be something up there in the Harding mine." So, me and old Woody went up there, this guy was rich from manufacturing picnic boxes for Coca-Cola that they used.

AW:
Coleman boxes?

ME:
You remember those little boxes? And he manufactured those. He got the uranium fever, hired a geologist, who didn't know one damn thing about that any more than we did, really. So the freak thing, you want to talk about the land of shadows, we got out of the car there just by the highway past the Harding Mine, up on the hill there to the southwest, that Penasco Highway that comes there up in the mountains and we walked across there. He had the Geiger counter, the geologist, and he's getting a little background—not any more than, you know, he wasn't getting excited about anything—and I looked down there, just walking along, and there was a black rock, it had probably been there thousands of years because it was sitting in dirt. It was just sitting up; it was about two to three inches, sort of semi-square. And out of curiosity, I just picked it up. And I handed it, and that geologist said, "That looks metallic, let me see that." And he started his Geiger toward it, and it burned it plum out—needle went over and just hung. And we all, in all honesty, we thought we'd discovered what was pitch-blend, which is a primary ore which is black and really heavy, and this was really black and really heavy. And it sure as hell had—but what it was a rare-earth combination that they'd had used there, they even had the natives picking it up and putting it in buckets, little pieces of this, it was such crucial metal during the war.

AW:

I'll be derved.

ME:

But it was in a pegmatite dikes, which would come up out of the earth and just form dikes, not big massive deposits, and this stuff, over the centuries and eons, it had broken out of those dikes, and—

AW:

Yeah. Eroded out?

ME:

Yeah, and it was just scattered, the pieces were scattered out around there. None of us had any knowledge of that. But this guy was so greedy, that he couldn't wait to get us back to town. He was staying at that Indian Hills motel. And he was so damn greedy, that he wouldn't even wait for us to see a lawyer. He took out a yellow pad—anyway, a big pad—and wrote out, in longhand, a contract, with us to stake those claims, and he gave us a ten-thousand-dollar check. And there we are, from drinking beer on the credit, we got ten thousand dollars! (AW laughs) And we took it to the bank, and they called the bank and everything, and they verified it, and we just suddenly, we didn't know what the hell to do. We'd agreed in our deal there that we'd stake a bunch of claims up there so I said, "Well, I don't know how to stake claims, do you Woody?" And he says, "No." The old Marian Miner says, "Well, hell, I do!" That old cowboy. And he did. He knew how to stake claims, so we just paid him to go up there. And to hold a claim you had to, I forget, you had to dig a prospect hole so deep on ore, some kind of ore. So he said, "Hell, I'll just follow that dike, that pegmatite dike and we'll dig a hole right there, we're going to get minerals." So we paid him; he went up there and hired some guys in Penasco, Hispanic people that just delighted in the whole deal, and that's how we started in the mining business. So all this other stuff came afterwards.

But, you know, ten thousand dollars, to two starving artists, way back then—

AW:

That was a lot of money!

ME:

It was just—somebody had given us a bank. (AW laughs) I mean, we started out in debt and broke and couldn't drink, pay for a beer. By nightfall, we were so damn rich we didn't know what we were doing. (both laughs) I mean, you can imagine us going crazy, because we went to—two old dumb artists—we went to Santa Fe and hired a lawyer, his name was Hawk, I don't

know whether he spelled it with a “k-e” at the end or not. But to do us a corporation. So we called it “Taos Uranium and Exploration Company.”

AW:

Taos Uranium and Exploration Company?

ME:

Taos Uranium and Exploration Company. So we formed this corporation, so when it was all—we got the papers, it took two or three days—we didn’t care, man, we had beer money and hamburger money and everything else. And so at the end, so when he finally handed us the corporate papers, I said “Now, is there anything else we have to do? Are we ready to operate? We can start going out and gathering money and getting stuff done at the mine?” He said, “It’s all done, right there.” Well. That snake came back to bite us many years later, but we went on and got started, and of course, that geologist had gone and had that rock checked out and he looked like a fool to the guys. So that guy disappeared. But heck, we didn’t care, we had a mine and we just started selling stock, we were going to develop that mine.

AW:

The mine up--

ME:

Up on Fraser Mountain.

AW:

Yeah, the copper mine.

ME:

Yeah.

AW:

Not the uranium.

ME:

Yeah, no, we knew we didn’t have any uranium. But by then, we knew it. So, we sold quite a bit of stock, just go out on the street, and we had these beautiful specimens, and we sold quite a bit of stock, just right around like that, right in Taos, New Mexico, the poorest place in the world.

AW:

On the street corner! (laughs)

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ME:

Yeah. We started. We just hired miners, and Questa, old Questa works for Taos there. There's a lot of out-of-work miners, always, because—

AW:

Yeah, because all of that along the Colfax county and all through to Red River, and—

ME:

Molybdenum mine. That great molybdenum mine. But there's always miners out of work, and miners working. So we hired real miners, good miners from Questa, and started them digging up there. There's pictures of them, you'll have pictures of us when we started. In fact, there's a bunch of them in that book there, of us when we started digging up there, and shipping over, and all kinds of damn things. But we, all of a sudden, we just got spread out; so we needed some big money.

AW:

When you say "spread out," you mean the veins that were producing were further apart?

ME:

Yeah, and also, not only were we finding more ore up on that mountain, more prospects, good prospects, but the geologist had estimated, I'll never forget this, because the first report they had what they called "preferred ore." They'd made a judgment by going in these tunnels we'd opened and where they were located, of how much ore was there without us having drilled. So they called it "preferred ore." I don't remember the exact figure, but it seemed like to me it was four-hundred and seventy-six thousand tons. So old Woody said, "Well, I know some people in Oklahoma and around that might be interested, let's go." So we went to Tulsa, and I couldn't believe the people that knew him and loved him. They just adored him! And they'd just buy this damn stock. We hardly had to even do anything, even show them the ore.

AW:

And Tulsa's, it's an oil town, an exploration town anyway. So they're—

ME:

Oh yeah. And I thought, "My God!" So we came back, that first trip we raised, I don't know, around a million dollars.

AW:

Wow.

ME:

And we came back, I remember, we came back through Sand Springs because that's where he was a little orphan boy, and now he was a national hero and international, in fact. You know, Queen Elizabeth had collected him, and Winston Churchill had a set of his etchings, things like that. So we come back by and we meet the guy who's the head of the Church of God in Sand Springs, and have dinner with him. And the Church of God bought eighty thousand dollars' worth of that stock. (both laughs) I just thought everything was just like that— hell, I was planning who was going to give money to, and all kinds of things like that. So, anyway, there we were, making all this damn money, and we were going out prospecting all over four or five states.

AW:

But now, you were mining ore, and bringing it in, so it's not like you were just selling stock, you actually had a company.

ME:

Oh, no, we mined. We opened a mine in Red River, that beautiful little town, and I got a cut in the back opening that. That's part of the long story here. (coughs) Red River was really small; still is, but it's very prominent for Oklahoma and Texas people, and to vacation, they love it there.

AW:

Yeah, still, still that way.

ME:

Yeah. And so the people there really resented the fact that we'd found out, I don't know how—

AW:

Can we stop just a minute, let me change batteries here. With Red River, hold on.

Break in recording.

AW:

All right, after a battery change, it's still Max Evans and Andy Wilkinson on March 19, 2015, and Max has started talking about Red River and finding a claim there, that didn't make you popular with the locals.

ME:

No. We found out there was no mine that had been opened there. Our geologist somehow, I don't know how he did, but historians knew at the time, I don't know if they still know this or not, but that mine was open way back there, in the late 1800s.

AW:

Yeah, in fact, in their museum today, in Red River, they have photographs, and that valley was chock full of people because of that mine. It was amazing.

ME:

Yeah. Well, that mine had caved in. And then what had happened to it was that the Comanches had come down on a hunting party from the plains. North plains of Texas, and they killed every single miner, and that mine was named after some watch company, but it had one more letter, that wasn't the watch company, I can't remember what that was. That's in the history up there, somewhere. And we started opening that thing up. Well, it was one heck of a surprise. You know, we were doing this at great jeopardy, because people threatened my life; they literally threatened my life if we opened that damn mine. But I was just young and full of it, and so I told them, you know, "I'm going to open it." And it's just beyond the creek, right across from Red River, the town of Red River, for god's sake. And we had prospected way up on the mountain and found outcrops of copper, about ten claims of them, which is twenty acres a piece. So we, unbeknownst to this town of Red River, we had decided among ourselves—me and Woody and some other people involved later—that we'd only mine it underground, and we wouldn't open pit it no matter what, no matter how much money. It wasn't any use of telling people, because they seeing you up there, digging out their mountain, right in their little resort town, I don't blame them. If they'd had a machine gun and took after us, I wouldn't have blamed them a bit. But, by golly, that was the dangdest thing. We opened that tunnel up. The Indians had caved it over, and some timber had started rolling out of it—I forget what the general formation was, but it broke up into rocks like this, real easy.

AW:

Like a big six, eight inch square of rocks?

ME:

Yeah, or bigger even. And it when we got the tunnel open, we walked in there with the first lights. I went in there with—Woody wasn't there. I went in there with our mine porter, Robert Crestwell, old Bob Crestwell. And he had this big light; he decided he had a miner's light. And then we had, I had a great big sort of a flashlight lamp—big, powerful light. That ore, enough moisture seeped through that it enriched the color of that ore, and that whole thing was just beautiful blues and greens with copper. There was a little pond that had formed there and it was just pure, pure water, you know, there was nothing—forty, fifty years, nothing had bothered it at all. It was the most beautiful, it's like one of the great treasures of the earth, just opened up for it, it was a wondrous day. Somehow terrifying, at the same time extremely beautiful. All the words I have and have had to in my life, I don't have any to describe this beauty, this feeling. And so we went on and kept walking back in that mine. And we could tell it was a little dangerous every

now and then there'd be a little pile of rubble but we made it back, and he had been stepping it off. He said "This tunnel's over fourteen-hundred feet." But a strange thing happened at about thirteen-hundred feet somewhere there. I had walked out ahead of him and all a sudden he grabbed me and jerked me back, just threw me back, old Bob Crestwell. And I said, "What in the hell?" I didn't know what to think. He said, "My God, that open flame on the helmet had gone out."

AW:

So he knew it was—

ME:

It started flickering out, and we'd hit a dead air pocket, and it'd have killed me instantly. And he saved my life there, jerked me back. So it's a dead air pocket. I think we measured—finally, he marked the dead air pocket with an arrow and then we measured to there, and if I remember anywhere near correctly, it's around fourteen hundred feet into the mountain. But there was three hundred feet of it that was really rich on the way in.

AW:

And not so rich the further in?

ME:

Yeah, and it was, it ran, we mined it and shipped it to an El Paso smelter, and made money out of it. It ran four-and-a-half to five percent, mine-run copper. It was real easy to mine, very dangerous but real easy. So anyway, we started going broke at the other mine, everything started going to hell—

AW:

On Fraser Mountain?

ME:

Well, copper dropped from forty-eight cents to twenty-four cents in ninety days. So if we'd have known, if we weren't just a couple of dumb amateur artists, Woody and I, we—Dan, oh, I almost had that geologist's name. Dan Hurley!

AW:

Dan Hurley.

ME:

Yeah. He had showed me and Woody on a chart, he said, "You guys have got lots of ore here in different places." But he said, "Here's what happens. Here's how mining companies survive."

Copper mining companies. The price always comes and goes, he said. It's like this. When they're down here, the companies have enough money put away from when it's up here to survive through the next times. Copper never stays, throughout history it just goes like this." We didn't pay attention to him. We didn't put the money back to, we just kept exploring and having fun and doing all of these adventurous things, we didn't have the funds set back to get through it. It was a precipitous, oh it was a terrible drop.

AW:

Oh yeah, that's half.

ME:

It just broke companies all over. You know, Phelps Dodge and those kind of companies, Anaconda, or those kind of companies, they survived of course, they're still mining. But it really dented us and all of a sudden we were really scrounging for money, and were trying to hold the whole thing together and it wasn't ever going to work, we didn't know it. Woody, he gave up before I did. But anyway, we had many other adventures besides that.

AW:

So, what ultimately happened to the Taos Uranium and Exploration Company?

ME:

Well, in the middle of all this, we changed it, in the first place, we changed it to the name of Taos Minerals, another corporation. And then at the end, when the price was still trying to hold it together, when the price had dropped, Woody and I formed separately of all the other stockholders, a little company called Solar Metals, S-o-l-a-r, which, oddly enough, was the one that was really successful.

AW:

Really?

ME:

Yeah. We'll get to that in a minute.

So, it, now as we're going broke, he started painting again. We set up this little new company out there, we swore that we would somehow salvage the stockholders, with this little company, Solar Metals. Well, ironically, we did, almost. But he started back painting, and he was painting there, (laughs) he was doing more painting. I'd write a story or try to paint again. But I made a discovery. I was prospecting 'way in the desert across the—I don't know what the hell I was doing (laughs), or what I thought I was looking for. But I was prospecting out there and it was just solid desert, about fifteen miles across the Rio Grande in that desert there to the north, that'd

be the northwest. Okay, there's a big perlite mine over Tres Piedras. So I, Johns Mansville's company was running it, and they were shipping perlite all over the world. And he was a guy who got famous, he was a multi-multi-millionaire, that got famous for having married nine wives, that was Johns Mansville. Everybody talked about him all over the country, not just miners. But he had that mine, and I thought, "Well, there can't just be one deposit of that dang perlite." I was stumbling around out there, and by golly, I just looked down there, and there's a greyish rock, and I just thought—well, when they mine it over there and mill it, it turns white, it loses the grey. I thought, "Well, maybe it's something." It turned out to be real higher-grade perlite than they had at the other mine. So somehow we got that Dan Hurley on the credit, which he sued me later, and I had to pay him to go out. And we somehow, also on the credit, or just digging up a little money here and there, we got that core drilled with Dan Hurley's supervision, it was called the Monte Mine after a hill I had found it on. Monte means hill. And our little drill program, as far as we could crowd it, it just a portable drill mounted on the back of a truck we leased. As well as I remember, it was 900,000 tons of perlite, high-grade.

AW:

Boy, that sounds like a lot to me.

ME:

But we were so broke, and desperate, that we finally had to sell that, before we could—

AW:

Sell your interest?

ME:

Yeah. Now here's the sad part of it, except it's not sad anymore, it's just a grand adventure. I had a lot of connections in Santa Fe, a lot more than Woody did, that I'd made, because I, you know, I just, I made them through this mining thing. There's a guy named name Alva Simpson who had gotten rich in the oil business down in West Texas and the combination. He was in on the early days of the uranium boom; he had big stock in home stake mining over there. And he was well known; I knew him. He was a rancher too, had a ranch out of Santa Fe there, southeast of Santa Fe. So I took these reports that were written by Dan Hurley in the drilling record finally to him. And Woody went with me, and we went over there. And he never said a word, I had to make the deal, he just followed me around. And I went up there just off of the plaza, about a block, where he had his offices, upstairs, one flight up, and sat down there and sold him that perlite mine. I owned the perlite mine. And he really did—he knew Dan Hurley, and really respected that. So he said, "Well look, I want to buy this from you," but he said, "I want to see if I can't either mill it in front, and then we can work it where you boys get some royalty." That was just his way of dealing. I don't know whether he was dealing to be real square with us or not, I'll never know.

AW::

Well, maybe he wanted to find out just how good a mine it was.

ME:

Anyway, he had a partner which will surprise you, it was General Patrick Hurley, who'd been ambassador to China. A great elegant man with a white beard and white staff. His son was Wilson Hurley, who became New Mexico's most famous landscape artist. Well, that was who, who we all went out, we even took old Dough-Belly Price with us. (laughs) We went out and looked at that mine. And I just stayed sort of in the background and tried to get Woody to; he did too. I said, "Let's just,"—because the papers are going to grab this; they did, they put it in the papers and things about them looking out there. So anyway, between them they knew a united, some kind of milling company, and they talked to the milling company and they'd worked out some kind of a tentative deal, and so, okay, he's ready to deal. So all we could get out of him was fifty thousand dollars. And we tried, I tried every trick I'd ever heard of to try to get him up, but we did get ten percent of the royalty.

AW:

Of the gross, not the mint? That's a pretty good deal, if there's anything coming out of it.

ME:

So the mill was set and everything. Okay, here's how the wreck came about. (laughs) The next wreck (laughs, coughs). There's a guy that Woody had imported from Keams Canyon, Arizona on the Navajo reservation, that was an engineer out there at that little Indian settlement that took care of their water pumps and everything. He'd made friends because his wife had taught there at Keams Canyon, K-e-a-m-s. And we had sold him twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of stock. And then we hired him to build a flue where we could dump this ore and off Fraser Mountain, about an eighth of mile downhill to save all kinds of work and money into a big ore pit and then a truck could just drive under there and load. And, okay, we got that done, and the damn thing didn't work, here's this doctor of engineering, and the cockeyed slope was wrong by a degree and a half, the ore kept choking up. It helped us go broke real good. So anyway, he went to our biggest stockholders around Taos and got them together—this is unbeknownst to me and Woody—to our back. And had said, "We got to take this over; they're going to sign this perlite to Taos Minerals and that's our stock. So we got to get rid of Woody and Max. They broke all these laws selling stock." So they stopped it, and they broke it with me. They formed a corporation and didn't register or ever think about that. You also got to register to sell stock, and we didn't. I asked the guy, the lawyer, paid him, and he said, "You're ready, go." So that's all we dumb artists knew. And so anyway, somehow, General Patrick Hurley and Alva Simpson broke up a friendship over this mine.

AW:

Really?

ME:

And Patrick Hurley was gone, Alva took it over, and he gave us a check for fifty thousand in the royalties. So it wasn't a day later where we were trying to figure how to divide that up, so the biggest investors that were getting hit the worst would have pieces of this and get some money. And we were really working, going back and trying to find out. When this guy—James Coad was his name, C-o-a-d. He had gathered-up, and they filed a suit on us, and took us to court trying to put us in the penitentiary.

AW:

Now, he had been one of the investors?

ME:

Yeah, I say, he was an engineer; he was the one that made us really go under by—

AW:

By miscalculating that slope?

ME:

Yes, but he got these to our back, and they got us to court in Santa Fe. Me and Woody. Anyway, I'll tell you about the court in a minute. We figured out the biggest stockholders and we divided up that royalty and sent them money. We never kept any of it, just enough expenses to get back and forth there. That's the best we could ever do, in our minds. And it turned out that was it was a great thing for those people; that perlite mine ran forty-four years, day and night. Forty-four straight years, and we never got another dime out, never, nothing. But they took us over there, and they had us up there in court and old James Coad was there, he was the one who did it, said Woody had sold him this twenty-five thousand dollar stock that wasn't, that broke the law. So the judge had Woody up on the stand, and then he let him go and had me up on the stand. I didn't know he was going to recall Woody. He had me up there, and he questioned me, all these lawyers and people around there, and he asked me, "How did you not know to do this?" And I said, "I told you, I've explained it. If I own a racehorse or a mule, they're mine if I own them, I can sell them to anybody I want to. That's the way I thought about it." And he didn't show any motions one way or the other. And he said, "Recall Woody," and I thought, "Oh God, this is it. We're going to the penitentiary sure as hell." And our souls were absolutely innocent. In all this, we had really made a lot of people happy, and we felt that these other people were really going to get paid, which they did. And the thing that turned everything to this judge, was he started questioning Woody again, and he asked him if he didn't know about this law? He named the law. And Woody said, "No. No sir." He said, "I used to know, I taught over there in Kansas for a while, and they had a blue law there that you couldn't go the picture show on Sunday." He meant

it out of his heart! And this judge started breaking up laughing, and he said, "These boys are not guilty! Dismiss the contract!" (laughs)

AW:

(laughs) So between the blue law and selling the mule—

ME:

So anyway, that ended our mining world, though.

AW:

Well now, so, were you completely out of mining, how did you get involved in this mine down by the airbase? Do we need to leave that for another day?

ME:

I bought that, I just love it up there, I didn't really buy it for the mine. I did sort of, in a way. I really love that tunnel.

AW:

Oh you just wanted the land?

ME:

I just wanted to go up there and look at it, go in and look at the ore. It's eighty-two acres in the middle of half-a-million acres that I could wander around in up there, it's just—I loved it. Still do. I wish I could go up there right now, wish we could go up there. But that darned perlite mine, Pat and I used to go up in Colorado for different business things, and we'd drive by, and we'd see the road where they could come out past that other mine, hit that highway, and they go to Antonito, Colorado, and that's where—they put it on the railway there. And we could see loading docks and the storage facilities there at Antonito, we always got a kick out of that, at least we done that, even though we weren't getting anything out of that. It always gave—

AW:

Yeah, that is interesting, to have been the one who had created that thing really did make a lot of people a lot of money, and...

ME:

No telling how many kids were sent to college out of that mine. I know one guy, one of my uncles, he'd bought stock, old Vernered, the kid of the Evans family, Vernered, lived down at Houston. So he was one of them we gave money and a little thing back, because he'd bought a bunch of stock—never even came up to look at it, just bought it. And so we gave him a little royalty and he sent two kids completely through college.

AW:

On that royalty?

ME:

Yeah. And one of them six years' school. So it did a long good in the long run. I never, I just, people would come to me for years and, and every now and then I'd go and look at a mine. But I'd just go in and get samples, but I didn't ever get back into it at all. I've always had a mine, now, for all these years since then, so I got the Galena King, we've had now, about fifty-five years. I've had it for several years before we moved here and soon we'll have lived here for fifty years. We bought this place here in 1966 and moved here in '67, and I already had the mine, so it was back—So I've always had a mine for my whole life, almost.

But Woody, I had a lot of other wonderful adventures with him. I wrote a story about this, the old Kiowa that adopted him was a mean old sucker; he didn't enjoy... He was kind of kicked out of the tribe. And he told Woody stories about him and a guy riding, robbing a bank, and they were, the posse was just about to catch him, and they decided to hide gold coins they'd robbed in some bank around Tulsa there. And buried this money right out of Tulsa, and said, he told them about a mark on the cliff that they'd made so he could come back and get that money, and he said, he told Woody, he was going to go back and get it when things died down a lot more, still needed a little time. So Woody kept, after we was going broke, he kept thinking about that treasure this old Kiowa said he'd buried. Hell, he raised him, he believed him, you know? It was just, well, I want to tell you a strange thing, I wrote a story about this. It's the last story in *The Love of Horses* called "The Ghost Horses of Tulsa." In that book *For The Love of a Horse*. And that's the story of Woody and I finding this mark on that bluff hole there. And we heard the noise of horses coming off that bluff up there while we were digging, and we just scared us to death. And they came right to the edge of the bluff—it's all in that story. I can't tell it again, I can't, it's too much. And we heard them jump, and they never—

AW:

Never landed?

ME:

Nope. And all kinds of weird things happened there. We'd gone to a lady there in Tulsa. And we'd never seen her before in her life. And she was an Osage medium. And it's all in the story about how she got involved in this. And we had lots of great adventures.

One of them, I'll tell you the one that Pat was sort of involved in. We had a —out there at our place out there on the edge of Taos-- we had about eighteen, twenty acres sub-irrigated ground, and I'd leased a long strip of land out there. It ran off that mesa; it was narrow, narrow strip

come down to the corrals. And we ran our horses out there, and I had eight or ten horses. Anyway, I told Woody, "I'm going to gather the horses. You want to come out and we'll gather horses?" And we'll go down to—we still had our horse trailers. He had this old horse that, sort of a paint, he was black, but he had a white spot on him, and he had a white blaze down his face and he had one pink eye. So he was a great horse, and I remember his name. Felix.

AW:
Felix?

ME:
Woody just loved him. And so I said, "Come on out and we'll gather these horses. And we'll take our two—Felix—I've got to get my favorite horse, I'm going to ride old Powderface, I'm going to take him with us." We'd gotten permission to go camping down on the San Cristobal Ranch, right under the White Bluff Ruins that I'd loved as a kid. And I told Woody all the experiences I'd had there; he just couldn't hardly wait to go. So, he didn't bring a saddle. I said, "God, you're not going to ride old Felix to gather these horses, are you? He's just like a cutting horse, he'll turn out from under you if they turn back." Anyway, he said, "No, no, no, it's fine." So we rode on up there to end of that pasture of horses that was grazing there, and we turned them, bring them back to that corral in that narrow strip we had fenced there, and they were in a dead run. And sure enough, got right down to the corral, it whipped right back and that old horse turned right back with him, and old Woody Crumbo went down in the desert in a cloud of dust. And so I'd been trained as a cowboy kid, that you save the horses, and then see—

AW:
See what's happened (laughs).

ME:
Yeah, then you see what... And I went back and got those, turned those horses right back by him and pinned them. And I came back and he was walking, leading that horse, old Felix, and one arm was just down limp.

AW:
Oh, he'd thrown it out.

ME:
Yeah. And so it was a compound fracture in his upper arm.

AW:
Woa.

ME:

And I could feel the bone. It was actually bleeding. And I said, "Well." Oh, one of the horses had a porcupine in it—is why we were also. And I said, "We got to get those porcupine quills out of that horse." Horses, oddly enough, they get curious to see a porcupine out there. And they'll swat the tail, and then if you don't find them, it'll kill them, because it cuts off their breathing, they swell. I said, "I got to get the quills out of that horse. You just stay out of the way. I know how to do this. I've done this before." But anyway, he said, "Well, go ahead and get the quills out. I'll make it, it's all right. I'll make it before we go to the doctor." I thought he was going to die; he looked—he was one white Indian. But I roped that old horse. The way you do with, you get the quills. You rope them, and then you pull them up to the corral, but you get on the other side, you tie them up there, so they can't paw you. They would paw the hell out of you. So I jerked—

AW:

So you reach over the fence to get the quills?

ME:

Yeah.

AW:

Through the fence.

ME:

Through the hole. So I finally got that old horse where I couldn't find any more quills. And I loaded Woody into an old station wagon I had then, and started to take him to the hospital. But I was really getting worried about him. He was just, he was getting pale and pale, and couldn't hardly talk. So we drove over that old dirt road up there to town, and we got there right in front of, right on the highway where it curves. You either go, if you're going north, you either go straight on to the pueblo, or you turn left and go to Colorado.

AW:

Where the Old Blinking Light Restaurant and Bar is. Yeah. Yeah. I know right where that is.

ME:

Well that wasn't there then.

AW:

Right, but I know right where that—

ME:

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Okay. So. He said “Whoa, whoa wait, stop.” So I pulled off there. He said, “I can’t make up my mind.” I said, “You got to, I’m going to get you to the hospital. That’s a very serious thing, Woody, don’t take it light.” He said, “Oh, I know it, but I think I want you to take me to Mr. Menow instead.”

AW:

(laughs) At the pueblo. So you did?

ME:

I did.

AW:

How did his arm do?

ME:

Well, here’s another adventure with Woody Crumbo. Made us closer and closer, I guess, throughout our lives. Old man Menow sat down in front of him, he sat him on, he had a little couch there. And he got his arm, pulled it—he fainted two or three times.

AW:

Oh, I imagine.

ME:

He finally got it up on his shoulder, and he said, “Now, just please don’t move.” And he started working on the bone. And old Woody, he just, oh God, he was taking it but I—I thought he was going to die. And all of a sudden, I had admiration for a doctor beyond anything I’d thought I ever had. Old Woody just fainted. Pain just hit him, and Mr. Menow said, real gently, “I’m sorry, Mr. Crumbo. I messed up and twisted the wrong way.” Who would ever—a doctor ever admit that? And he just worked and worked. And then he yelled at his wife, to mix—you know, in Indian, he was talking in Indian to her, and English to us -- and she was in there mixing stuff up. I could hear her; well, I could actually see her mixing stuff in the pan. I don’t know what the hell it was. So finally he got that, he had a sleeve he’d cut off and everything. He took that stuff out of that pan and with a wooden spatula, he slowly put that on there and you could just see that stuff just close down on that arm.

AW:

Really? Like a cast?

ME:

Yeah. And then he folded it into a sling. And then old Woody, he gave him something to drink. And he started feeling better. He sat up there and he got his arm in a sling, and he told him, he said, "Now, Mr. Crumbo, you can't move that arm or do anything with it, you know." And he said, "You can't drink, smoke, or anything like that now for like fourteen days." Well, a compound fracture, I found out later, usually takes six to eight months. And fourteen days later here comes old Woody, out to the house. He said, "You know, I think I can get on old Felix." (AW laughs) And I said, "Oh God, you can't. You'll break that arm loose, we're doomed." He said, "Naw, I want to go down, I know we got to go down to White Bluff." He said, "We've been talking about it all our lives." Well, we had been talking about it, about three years. And so I couldn't talk him out of it. Two days later we loaded our horses and saddles and went down there and we had permission from the owners of the ranch at that time. Now they won't let me in there, new owners. We camped there for five, six days, and we rode all over, looking at stuff, looking at the great petroglyphs and everything. We had a grand adventure. He cooked with one hand at night; he was good cook. And then we'd sit around the fire, I gathered all the wood and everything, and he could get on his horse, but he couldn't get up on him, though. I had to saddle him. And then I'd push him; he'd get the reins in one hand and I'd shove him up and we'd ride around all that day, arm still in that sling. He said, you know, I just, it's blowing my mind, all of this. So at night we'd sit around that fire and I'd read coffee [grounds], he did insist I read, and all kinds of historical things about the Indians that lived right there in that pueblo cave. And in my mind, my head, I'd tell him these things. I only remember one, but he said every one of them were things that people just didn't know, hardly anybody except a few Indians knew. But I saw this, in this cup, I saw this guy herding turkeys like sheep. Back then, now, several historians are aware, that really happened. And Woody knew it. I remember that part. But he said I told things that hardly anybody knew. The ancient Indians, different spiritual things about them. So it was one of the grandest trips I was ever on in my life, with him and that broken arm, that compound fracture. So that's one of the many, many adventures besides the—

AW:

Well, let's take a pause right here, I need to take a moment and visit the restroom. But that's terrific.

Pause in recording.

AW:

Right, thank you, I'm back.

ME:

Well, we'll get into two houses he bought. He finally got that place paid for south of Taos that little ranch. Then I guess he was borrowing money on it and one thing or another. His wife was, I think, getting pretty disgusted with all this, this beautiful woman. The little kids were growing

up. And during this whole interim I had an old horse I'd bought for a roping horse, an old mare called "Sleepy K." She was the strangest old horse. You'd ride her in the box, get ready to rope, and she'd just act like she was asleep. And when that calf came out she'd just go as hard as she could. So was a real honest horse; she just couldn't run fast enough, but she gave me all she had. Well, I liked to win when I was roping her; have a chance, anyway. So in all this, there's another Indian kid, Modoc kid, called Sonny James. Finally, they called him "Sonny Jim." He became Woody Max's best friend. Well, they had all this land on that creek and they visited all the time out there; they became the best friends in the world, Woody Max and Sonny Jim. And they called him "Sonny Jim," eventually that became his name, because he finally married a Navajo woman, married four or five of them, I guess, there's an army of his kids over there on the Navajo reservations that are at part-Modoc. He became a world champion Indian rodeo hand, won the world champion All-Around once, and won all the bull-riding twice, and the bronc-riding once. So he was a huge hero; and how he got this nickname, later, at this time I'm talking about, he was just "Sonny," a kid there. Best friend of Woody Max. They grew up together there on that place. But later, when he'd win all those rodeos, he'd come through, and the kids would yell out—he was just a great hero to the Navajo—"Sonny Jim! Sonny Jim!" they'd call him. So that became his name, just became his name. He got shot and killed a couple of years ago, was on the cover of *True* magazine two or three years ago.

AW:

Really?

ME:

Over there, a guy shot him, killed him. But anyway, I gave them this horse. Sleepy K. And that's how—and my uncle had gotten a little ranch outside of Taos, my old cowboy uncle. We had arranged that through the mining some way. Well, he took these two kids in, Woody Max and Sonny Jim, and he really made cowboys out of them. I mean, he knew everything there was about working cowboys, and he made hands out of both of them, Woody Max too. But Woody Max just did not have the talent that Sonny Jim had, he just—but they ran together for years because of this old horse. And they trained off of that old pony, old Sleepy K. And Woody Max would go around, and set up these rodeos himself; he got to be a rodeo promoter. And old Sonny Jim would win half the time. They really teamed up. They had a great life together there for a while. Man, they'd chase women; they were both tall, good-looking kids. They had a grand paradise, all because of that old horse, and my uncle teaching them how to be, he really taught them. So just much came out of the relationship with Woody Crumbo. When his kid got shot out here, he was doing a good deed.

AW:

When Sonny Jim got shot?

ME:

Yeah. And killed. About three years ago, I guess. They put him on the cover of *True* magazine and named him "The Great Navajo Legend." And he had gone, two neighbors—he finally got a little place, got hooked up with an old woman who had a place out at by Grants. And she loved rodeo, he was still rodeoing in his fifties. His arm, one of his arms, his shoulder, had been knocked down. Sometimes he'd actually go out, and take a sling off, and everybody just was in awe of how he could rodeo, in his fifties, he could beat the hell out of kids. But anyway, he always was, with his absolutely madness, this guy, he had a hell of a good streak in him. If somebody was having trouble, he tried to straighten it out. Well, they were having trouble, a couple of guys, over a fence line. So he heard about it, and they were really having a feud over there by Grants, New Mexico, not far from the Navajos. He went over to help straighten it out, and the guy shot him and killed him, and the other guy ran off—wasn't even going to help. I've got it here somewhere; I'll dig it up for you somewhere.

AW:

Man, that's a sad thing.

ME:

All this kind of thing. Well, Woody Max, he taught his kids art, and Minisa, they were both tremendously spoiled. But she went through, she married a guy, an agent, that had all these famous country singers back then. He had all of them. Man, he was one rich, powerful guy. And she was so beautiful, he married her; so she had a market for her paintings right there to all these rich singers. And of course, they loved her. And she could be a bitch to everybody, but she knew how to handle them. And they love her. I guess she liked him too, cause she did. They're still together, by the way, living in Tulsa. I can't think of his name either, but he was a famous sucker. She toured Russia with her work, first Indian—first American woman who ever had shown in Russia. He tried to paint and everything, and he was good, but he—

AW:

Woody?

ME:

Yeah.

AW:

It was Woody Max?

ME:

But he just didn't care. Finally, in his late years, after his Daddy—before his Daddy died, then after—he made jewelry, Indian jewelry; sold every piece. But he had a failing that a lot of people, a lot of guys, I suppose, would think they'd like to have. Up—he's in his sixties now, so I don't know—I haven't seen him in a long time—but, women just fell nuts over him. And it ruined his damn life. It just made him nothing but a puppet. He just would go from one woman to another. And he could never settle in, and he had no problems. He'd just be there. Looks; he was six foot four, this Indian; his mother was a beautiful Creek. Woody was a real handsome Potawatomie, but he had some French blood. They were both just ruined by being born so damn pretty. Both of them.

AW:

Yeah. How do you spell Minisa's name?

ME:

M-i-n-a-s-a. Minisa. No: M-i-n-i-s-a, Minisa.

AW:

Yeah. I knew I'd seen it, but I couldn't recall it.

ME:

I made friends with—I got to tell you about Woody's death. We got separated in our lives, and I started writing and he went different places and did different things. He wound up head of the El Paso Museum of Art. And that was the last professional thing that he did down there. He did a great job. He built that up into a tremendous museum. You know, he got people like Tom Lea and those great Texas artists. And Minisa was going on with great singers, country singers of the world, and selling them paintings. And Woody, all he had to do was show up and have some woman take care of him. If she got tired of him—that was his life. The way he lived. I made friends with Woody, Jr. By the way, he posed as his father in sold silk screen prints for years and years as his father. That's how he—also utilized that getting those women and people. About fifteen years of his life he lived like he was his daddy.

AW:

While his dad was still alive?

ME:

No.

AW:

Oh, after?

ME:

Yeah. He was scared of him. He wouldn't have done it while he was still alive. So I guess I, anyway, I, Woody came up here to this house, he was sitting right there, he and his wife, and we had a grand time. He brought Woody Max with him, and we went out to—well, it's gone now, but, mine, and Luther Wilson's favorite restaurant, Baca's. We spent all the times talking over publications; we made lots of deals in there. We went there for dinner, and it was a grand meeting. And then we, like old friends that have been apart so long, "We got to do this more," and all that. He wound up over at Eagle Nest. He'd put in a little gallery in his late seventies over there. And I hadn't seen him for years. And there's an old mine that I used to own myself up on Baldy Mountain there. And he had, somehow, he'd gotten a hold of that. And everybody thought he was always going to develop that mine; I didn't dream he was still talking about it. But a great friend of ours, a syndicated columnist out of San Diego, Woody had never met him, but he'd heard me talk about Woody Crumbo for years. He was really a tremendous writer, John Sinor, S-i-n-o-r. He had a syndicated column, out of the—column top-to-bottom -- that he did five or six weekly there out of the big papers in the Copley chain, C-o-p-l-e-y, at that time was as big as AP and United Artists' Chain. And he did a column there that was some of the finest writing I've ever read in newspapers. God, what a writer he was. In San Diego, he was a real modest guy. Women, old women would see him that all read his column. He wrote such beautiful family things that they just worshipped him. Here's a guy who's real modest and wonderful guy, didn't want to be anything like this; you couldn't walk down the street with him in San Diego, these people would run up. But we became dear, dear friends. He'd come stay a week, ten days with us here. But he became an alcoholic, and he wasn't a mean one at all. He married a woman; he had five kids, and she had six.

AW:

Oh my goodness.

ME:

And there he was, just with his salary. He's syndicated all over the world, everybody loves him, he could just barely keep all these people together. But he'd come out here to escape, he'd escape with us here. Pat loved him too. He'd come in here and visit at night, and he'd drink. I wouldn't drink, when I was working or things like that I didn't do it. But every night he'd drink a, what do you call it, just under a quart? Not a—

AW:

Like a pint bottle?

ME:

Yeah, it was—

AW:

Oh, a fifth.

ME:

Yeah, he'd drink a fifth of brandy every cock-eyed night. I'd have to lead him into the bed. One time he called me and he said, "Okay. You've helped me, and I've used a lot of your money getting drunk over the years." He said, "I'm coming to give you a treat." He said, "I've been sticking a little money aside for two years." He said, "I'm taking you up to see Woody Crumbo. Taking you on a mountain trip." Well, I didn't know that he couldn't take altitude.

AW:

Who, John couldn't?

ME:

It just, it just killed him. From here to Santa Fe, that much rise in the altitude, I could see he was sick. And I thought, "My God, Eagle's Nest is nearly a thousand feet higher than this." And I wanted him to come home. He said, "No, no. This trip has to be. I'll be all right." So we went, next day we got to the Eagle's Nest, about three o' clock in the afternoon. And we went up, I could tell he was really sick, but he was holding it together beautifully for me to have this time with Woody. He planned it, sacrificed like hell for this time to come about. And I'll be danged, the gallery was closed. We hammered on the door, we couldn't get anybody anywhere, so we went off down there and got a motel room. Then he decided we'd have a beer. I could tell he was sick, so I had a beer with him. And about five-thirty or six, I said, "If you feel like it, just run me back up there." We had a motel room, and it had a little restaurant and beer joint in front, we were sitting there, I said, "Run me back up there and let's try, see if Woody has come back from wherever's he's gone, one more time." And I went up there and knocked on the door and old Woody opened it. "Ah, Max, come in!" And John went in and he took a picture, it's in that book, of me and Woody, the last meeting we ever had. And then he got deathly ill. And he said, "Max, I've been looking forward to this for years, but I ain't going to get to make this." He said, he told me and Woody, "I know, if I just stay here a while it's be a historic meeting, but I'm just going to have to miss it, boys." And he went on back to the room and he just went to bed, he was deathly ill. And, of course, I didn't know how sick he was until the next day. So me and Woody, the reason I hadn't—he just closed that gallery, that little gallery they had there, and they lived in the back, they had an apartment back there, and you couldn't hear. He could go back there and you couldn't hear the knocking. So we went back there and set with Lillian—his wife—and we started and visiting about six o' clock in the afternoon, and suddenly it was daylight. We had visited that long. And she had sat there and listened to all of it. And I said, "I can walk. I got to go now. I'll just walk, it's just two blocks down here." It's really cold and it snowed a little bit, and frozen. And he said, "No. I'm going to drive you." And I really didn't want him to. He looked awful frail to me. But he insisted on it, and he got this old station wagon started. He loved

station wagons. And he drove me down there, and I had brought a copy of *The Mountain of Gold*, a little book I'd done. Been inspired by the incident I'd experienced up at Penasco with that old miner, it inspired that book. And I can't ever forget it; as I tell you this, I see him. He just, all daylight, he's just sitting there in the car, and I said, "Wait a minute, Woody. I got something I brought I forgot. I'd brought *The Mountain of Gold*, autographed to he and his wife. And I went in there and got it, he was still sitting there in the car. Hell of a picture, because he's all shriveled up, and he's cold, and he'd had a grand night, reliving many, many thousands of adventures which will never be told, because we can't remember them, they're too much. And I knew, when I handed him that book, that I'd never see him again. And about two weeks later, maybe ten days later, his wife called, the first time she'd ever called me in my life that I remember. And she said, "I want to thank you for that book. I read it out loud to Woody, and he made me read it again." And about four or five days later, why, he died. It was on the news; we found out about it on the news before we—so I called up there and I said, "Well, I'll come and help you," because I knew she was going to take him to the Creek, he wanted to be buried in the Creek nation in Ardmore. Well, now I can't think of the name of the headquarters of the Creek nation in Oklahoma. Anyway—

AW:
Anadarko?

ME:
Huh?

AW:
Anadarko?

ME:
No, that's—Anadarko, let's see; Anadarko's where the Chippewas, I think, live. Ah, I can't think of the name. Anyway, it's in that book there. That biography there. And she said, "No, Don," old Don, he's an Indian guy. She said, "He's going to help do it." She didn't want me to do it. So they took him back and buried him there where she was born in Oklahoma there. And it was the last time I ever saw him. It was a grand, grand night; we had a great, great meeting. We talked over all these dang things that night; it just couldn't have been greater. So that was a beautiful part of our life; it ended—our relationship ended in a very powerful, beautiful way. But I could think and go back and talk here for a week about it. But you know—

AW:
Well, I think it'll come up again, I'm sure, when we're talking about other things.

ME:

That's getting to be enough, I think.

AW:

So, today, I can stay a little while longer, I didn't know if you might want to go get some lunch before we leave, or if you—

ME:

Well, what time is it?

AW:

Let me look here. Eleven forty.

ME:

Well, if it wouldn't put you out of the way, we can run down to old Loyola's and have, and then you can bring me home, and get—I worry about you getting on the road, Andy, I know how—

AW:

Oh, I usually just take Carlisle up to the interstate. Head out, go straight east. So, it's—

ME:

I'm fine, but if you want to do that, if you want to eat before you take off and leave.

AW:

Oh, I don't care, I just wondered, if you were hungry we'd do it.

ME:

No.

AW:

You're not? Well, then let's—I try not to eat too much and then get on the road, because I tend to get a little sleepy.

ME:

Yeah. Yeah, I understand. That's where I'm worried, I don't want you to have to do that. So, we're just skip lunch and you can eat somewhere else then. I might think of something here; seems like there was one other thing I wanted to tell you—

AW:

Sure.

ME:

—Real bad about Woody, but I'm wearing out.

AW:

Well, don't worry about that; it may pop to you. Let's talk about next time we get together; you want to start with the writing?

ME:

With who?

AW:

The writing?

ME:

Yeah, that'd be fine.

AW:

And just sort of how it progressed.

ME:

Yeah. That'd be fine.

By the way, yeah, there's one thing I want to tell you about Woody. Comes from my mind. This surprises people throughout my life when I remember this. They'd be interviewing me for a TV show or something, and I can remember this thing. Right while I was sitting painting with him, and it's all so mixed up now, because it was mixed up. I was a writer, then I was a painter, he was an artist, and a dancer—

AW:

Yeah, and you can't take these things apart, it's like taking the straws out of the adobe.

ME:

Yeah, exactly, perfect description. But old Jack Schaefer had published a little book, pocket book, called *Shane*. And nobody knew about it. It wasn't famous, he wasn't famous, and Woody Crumbo read that book. Picked it up on the newsstand, as you could do in those days, and brought me *Shane*. And he said, "Max, this ain't the real thing, but it's really beautifully written, and I think you'll enjoy the book regardless." Now, that just came out of the blue. I became really close friends with old Jack Schaefer later in his life. He became later— it wasn't too much later, they made that movie, and he became world famous, and still is. But how Woody could understand that—it was like Big-Boy bringing me James L. Cain, James M. Cain. How those

two guys, how in the hell, you see—what's in the air, what's out in outer space-- somehow they knew things that I didn't know. My two closest friends. (coughs)

AW:

Do you mind talking just a little bit, before we shut this down, just talk a little bit more about the coffee grounds? And I'm curious about that, because I've had a friend of mine from the Middle East—in fact, I think she was born in Pakistan. She's a beautiful painter; a beautiful woman, but a beautiful painter, you would really like her material. She, when she wound up in Lubbock, she looked around and said, "This country is just like the country I left," you know, in terms of the hills and the cactus, and the colors in the soil, and the cedars and the yucca, and all that kind of thing. So she makes these big scenery paintings, landscapes, with these beautiful women floating along on rugs and tapestries and just up in the air; it's really interesting stuff. But she will read, and if you get a Turkish coffee, you know, one of those little tiny coffees that are so strong; she'll read those grounds. And she does something very similar to what you're talking about: swirls around, and then turns it upside down on a plate—

ME:

Hmm, where it's wider.

AW:

—And then gives it a little jolt, takes the cup off, and then reads the grounds—not in the cup; well, maybe she does, maybe she does that and then reads them in the cup; I can't remember.

ME:

You can do it either way, but you have to think about it first, how you're going to do it.

AW:

So, as you were just talking about it, it strikes me that, first of all, it takes someone who has the spirit to do it. Not anybody can take steps A, B, C, D, and E and read the grounds. You've got to have some ability to see something in there. Is that right? Is that...

ME:

Yes. This doesn't relate to Woody, but that time I was with Woody and I told you about earlier here, when we built living room, I told you about the windows, but I forgot to tell you about the floors. We didn't have the floor. We have the beams for the floor all in and everything. So we was having to put planks there to walk out of the house. To get water—we had a water well outdoors, then. Anyway, I won that money. So then I had to do the same thing to put the floors. I don't know who I robbed that time. John Dunn's dices, but I robbed them good. When I got the timber bought, then I didn't have anybody to do it. Luz was doing something else, so I'm putting in this floor in this house, out of Taos there, west of Taos. And I had a little portable radio that

Pat and I'd had from the first time we got married, we didn't have even a phone or anything, we had that little radio. We'd both paint and listen to that little battery radio; we'd listen to country stations in Tulsa that we just loved. I'd paint all night sometimes. I'd paint at night. You weren't supposed to, but I would, I'd get started, I'd just paint all night. She'd just stay up and draw or doing something herself with me. And we'd play that music and we just loved it, we had a grand time. Anyway, I had that little old radio out there while I was hammering; I wasn't into this carpenter stuff very much. But I was doing it because I had to. All of sudden, I had that floor about half in there, and I hear this thing on the radio about the Korean War breaking out someway or other. And I just, I had seen that in the cup three days before.

AW:
Really?

ME:
Yeah. And I had told Woody and Pat. And I said, "This can't be. It's showing up here. Can't be. We can't have another one, not this quick. Not this soon. Surely the world—we're so close to the last one." So when I heard that, I didn't remember that I'd seen that three or four days before. But I just took that hammer, and I just threw it into that floor, broke a board, had to replace a board. And I ran in there and told Pat, "Goddamn, they've done it again. The cock-eyed idiots of this world, they're never going to"—I really, I hardly ever lose my temper. I just don't. But I did. I just lost it. I thought, they can't be that, the human beast hadn't—surely to god hadn't regressed that much. It really did upset me. But I'd seen that, the same place I sat to read Woody's—and I told Woody about that. He knew that I'd seen it. So, that was another very powerful thing that came out of that coffee ground and tea leaves. They work both the same for me.

Yeah, I'd forgotten that. It was really a shock to my system. (laughs) I just—I got over it quick, but—anyway, old Woody—he just—I guess, these discoveries like this was more of what hypnotized him into coming out there all the time and reading these things. I used to think he was trying to find out things about for himself; but oddly enough, he wasn't, as I thought back on it later after we separated there. Why, it was just a big adventure to him, like the owl. That was a tremendous thing to him. He sent them on their ways, twisting their tail feather. (laughs) They damn sure went on their way. They screeched right in daylight. Mrraaaow! (owl sound) Old Pat right there, she's the one that saw the owls first when I was telling him. So, is there anything else you got you can think up here before we...

AW:
No, anything else we get started now, we're just get started and it'll be, we won't have enough time. But I'll be, I probably won't be able to come back until about mid-April. We've got this big music thing we're doing that I'm nominally in charge of. They put you at the head of a committee so they have someone to blame when things go wrong, you know? But it's actually,

it's going to be a good deal, it's not going to go wrong, it'll be great. But as soon I get that done I want to come back up here, and do some more visiting. And I may, next time, I may try, now that we're getting up early in the day, I may try just loading up in Lubbock in the morning and driving straight here and working and then staying a night and working another day so we can get a little more done, if that's—that's not wearing you out too much, is it?

ME:

No. I am wearing out, but I'm fine.

AW:

Well, what I mean is, if we, the next time we do it, if I come up and I get here about eleven o'clock, then we—

ME:

That's fine.

AW:

Okay, we'll do it that way.

ME:

Yeah. I have pretty good hours—usually, not always, of course, nobody does. But from about eleven-thirty to three-thirty is the prime time for my mind to work. My old, worn-out mind.

And—

AW:

We'll make that work, 'cause I can drive here.

ME:

That book that you see there, the biography of Woody, that was done by—oh god, what kind of Indian—Bob Perry.

AW:

Yeah, I don't know him.

ME:

Well, let's see what kind of Indian he was. Somewhere in this book here.

AW:

I'm going to go ahead and turn this off, and say thanks again, Max.

ME:

Well, this is probably Woody—this is Woody Crumbo stuff. Anyway, Pat and I was in Tahlequah, Oklahoma— twelve, fifteen years ago visiting our good friends the great Cherokee writer Robert Conley and his wife. We were staying with them. And there was a guy, Merv Jacob, another Cherokee painter, good painter. Illustrated children's books for his wife. He was really good. He dug Woody Crumbo's work, and he followed it all his life. And he thought he [Woody] was being treated wrong and wasn't being recognized for the things he'd done. And so he had a friend over there, a Chickasaw Indian from, they're over there by, somewhere close to Oklahoma City. Can't think of the name of that little old town. They're a wealthy tribe, the Chickasaws. They kept their oil money, and they got rich—they got old stuff in Albuquerque, and everywhere else. So, anyway, he was, his father had been one of the elders, and he'd wrote two or three little children's books, but this Cherokee, Merv Jacob, got Bob Perry interested in doing Woody Crumbo. So this particular night, when this book there, on Crumbo there, called *Indian Uprising*, when it first started, was in Robert Conley's home. The first interview ever made on that book was with me, by Bob Perry, and Merv Jacob asked if he could sit in, because he's the one that instigated this other crazy artist. I told him, "You bet, it's fine, we wouldn't be doing this." Well, the first interview, he was real slow; he wouldn't tape, he took things in notes.

AW:

Oh gosh.

ME:

Oh god, he was awful. It's bad on a guy being interviewed as it was him.

AW:

You can't keep a train of things going.

ME:

In later years I really regretted letting him do this, because I had to go back and edit this book.

AW:

Well, you mention that you'd edited the book. Yeah, so. Who published this?

ME:

They did, the Chickasaw Nation. In fact, they established their press—and they've done a lot of beautiful things since—to do this book.

AW:

It's a beautiful book.

ME:

It took him eleven years. To do the Peckinpah—not the Peckinpah—I keep bringing him up, because he's another one of my creative friends—to do the Woody Crumbo book, took eleven years. He made trip after trip out here to interview me. And Minisa wouldn't interview for a long time. She insulted him every way in the world.

AW:

Her dad?

ME:

His daughter.

AW:

I know. She wouldn't interview?

ME:

Bob Perry. No, because she and Woody had said all their lives after he died they were going to do this, and they never did. They just talked to people about it to keep them from doing it. And finally, I told him, I said, "Well, somehow, you've got to love country music, certain songs. Her husband, next time you meet, trying to get him, you mention these songs that you really, truly love, that some of his people did." I can't remember now, but he looked it up. He did it, and so she gave him a little information, not much. And Woody [Max] wouldn't hardly talk to him, because he told me, he'd me once a month he was working on the book on his daddy. Of course he wasn't, he was lying to me. We were doing this, so when he finally got it published, he had a hell of eleven years and went through hell. I admire him so much, even with all his shortcomings about how he hate to write and one thing and another, his heart was dedicated in getting the Woody Crumbo story. And he knew he was so underrated that it was just actually a sin committed against this man. And now, the sad thing is, he finally got this published. I had edited it, and worked on it, and fact-finding-edited my editing, and we got this dang book, there it is, and the kids did everything in the world to kill it. Minisa had them file suit on the press. They did kill it, for a long time. By the time he finally won the suit against her—it was a false suit—why, hell, the book had been published for a year or so. So, it killed him. And Woody was mad about it, and they since started trying to pick things apart, and I said, "You can't do it." I told Woody, I said, "You just might as well tell Minisa, you can't pick that apart, he researched that thing, and I've checked it every way on earth, you ain't going to get any closer to the truth, just quit it." He didn't. We didn't talk for three years because of that. It was a sad thing, but it was very beautiful. Old Perry stayed with it. He lives over in Louisiana now, old Bob Perry.

AW:

Does he?

ME:

Yeah, and he's become a pretty good writer. He does other books they publish there at the Chickasaw press, and he got acquainted with Luther and a lot of people that he wouldn't have gotten acquainted with. Luther would have published this finally, if he hadn't, if his own people hadn't decided to do it. So—oh, and while I'm at it, there's another thing I forgot about it. We'll here at the end tell the beginning influence Woody Crumbo had. You want to do this?

AW:

Sure.

ME:

Okay. Well, before we got into mining and everything—my god, I don't know how I could forget this, because it's a huge thing—he [Woody] decided that the Indians of America, their art was not being recognized. And he figured out a way to get the Indians of America recognized worldwide. Now, this shows what a great man he was underneath all the other things, because the Indians had actually blackballed him because he was painting in oils. And their tradition was watercolor. And it hurt him deeply. The shows that he was submitting to earlier, that he'd win, or place, and most of them he'd win, they wouldn't even accept or let him into shows, and you'd think with that he'd be so bitter, but he wasn't at all. And he talked to me about it, over and over. He said, "What I'm going to do is, I'm going to"—this is before mining, now—"I'm going to make these silkscreen prints somehow, and we'll put them all over the world, Indian art." Again, this guy, I believe it was, god, I could remember his name—Replogle [Luther I.] -- I'll never remember it again. He and his wife were visiting in Taos, every summer. And they fell in love with Woody's work. And they got to having beer together in the old Taos Inn where we spent so much of our life, early life, plotting and planning and surviving. And he agreed to finance these silkscreens; he set it up to make them. Well, Pat and his [Woody's] sister-in-law made the very first silkscreens ever made by Indians. And then they taught the Taos Indians how to make them. Pat and this— Woody's sister-in-law, Hazel. Hazel Tune was her married name. Husband's name was Tune, T-u-n-e. They talked to Indians and Woody somehow got a screenwriter, a television writer, a newspaper writer, hired; but before that, Frank Waters, who's now a famous writer, was editor of the Taos newspaper at that time. Barely making a living, in that little old town, old Frank Waters. Well, he was an Indian.

AW:

Frank?

ME:

Frank was a quarter-Indian.

AW:

I didn't know that.

ME:

Yeah, Crow Indian. So, he did a full-page write-up on Woody Crumbo in the *Taos News*. And Woody had just hired this guy for PR, his name was Robert Hyatt. He was a great photographer, he was a hell of a writer; he could write anything, that sucker. But he just fell in love with the project and quit. He ruined his career in Hollywood, gave it up, very successful career, to do this with Woody. And he took that and put that information that Frank Waters had done in photographs and it went all over the world. Associated Press picked up about these silkscreens. It was in every paper there was, and it was just going wild. And I was thrilled to death because they were going to, they had it set, they were going to do a series of my moonlight paintings in full color, for prints, along with his. And here Pat had a job, we were eating good, and it was all these wonderful things, and all of a sudden, this guy just—Replogle killed it.

AW:

How come?

ME:

Well, I didn't find out until way later. Way later. Nobody knows this, I'm fixing to tell it on this because it isn't going to matter. But his wife had fallen in love with Woody. Woody didn't even know it.

AW:

But Replogle knew it, and that was it.

ME:

And he couldn't stand it. She was a beautiful, wonderful woman. I just, I could see why anybody would fall in love with her. But she was just part of the game there; the big, important game that we were playing. Well, that really worked for other Indians. It put that blue horse out all over. He invented the blue horse, by the way. There's at least eight other Indians swore through their arteries that they did it, but I happen to know who did it. I was there when it happened, you know. And it went all over the world. That's when, at the same time he had a set of etchings, beautiful etchings. They're really collector's items now. Little black and whites, you know. So, that was before the mining. I'd forgotten about that, that was the most important movement ever made in the American Indian world, was what he made there, you know? When all the doors, all these artists that nowadays, he's been gone, they don't know what they owe to him. They just don't know what they really owe. All of them paint blue horses and blue deer now that want to, but he invented that.

AW:

A lot of white people paint blue horses too.

ME:

Oh yeah. Well, I got ahead of myself on the mining, but that happened before. And again. That was a huge adventure right there. But our dream was broken too, because there was her supervisory position gone, making the silkscreen. Pat was gone, and my, but, look at this, I never would have written because if it had gone, and I'd done those moonlights, I'd have painted them until I was dead, and I would have been dead long ago. So, that was meant to be; that was just absolutely, without any question, part of our space. But that was a huge adventure to be involved in. And poor old Bob Hyatt, he went broke along with it, and he was--

AW:

How do you spell Hyatt? H-e-i—

ME:

H-y-a-t-t. And he'd blown his career in Hollywood. Well, he was broke, flat broke; in fact, he stole what little money I had left there to leave town with. But he went back to Hollywood and did it all over again. Did "Gunsmoke" and some of those shows, and then he had, but he stayed there and launched—and helped through the mining company. He went back and conquered Hollywood again. One bad thing that had happened to him out of his truly great relationship with me and Woody Crumbo was he'd got the mining fever a little bit. So he went back out there and made a bunch of money. He had this crazy wife who he was crazy about, and she went him, and he just loved her, old Margo. Oh god, she was really crazy. But he just loved her more than anything on the earth. And they moved back to Silver City with a ton of money. And of all the dumb things on earth, watching all this thing, these idiotic things Woody Crumbo and I did, he came back there and went in the mining business, (AW laughs) and went flat under.

AW:

It sounds to me like that's a business that's pretty tricky.

ME:

It is really tricky, as tricky as you can get. Robert M. Hyatt, H-y-a-t-t. Boy, what a writer he was. He couldn't write a book.

AW:

Well, that's a different kind of writing than writing a—

ME:

And he knew it; he tried and tried and he knew it, and boy, he had—one time he had more little, what they call, what they call back in my beginning days, they had four kinds of stories for magazines and commercial sale: short-short stories, which would be fifteen hundred words or less; short stories, from fifteen hundred to sixty-five hundred words, or seventy-five hundred. Then seventy-five hundred to twelve-five was a novella. And then from that up to twenty-five thousand words was a novelette. And then at twenty-five thousand words, the novel started. So we had those tier markets. Well, at one time, he had more short-short stories published than anybody who'd ever lived.

AW:
Really?

ME:
Yeah.

AW:
That's interesting.

ME:
I don't know whether any of them are fiction or not; I don't have any idea. But a lot of people talked about it.

(pauses) It's just too much. I forgot all about that world-changing event to tell you the Woody Crumbo story, and I forgot the—at the end of it, I'm telling you what he did in the beginning.

AW:
That's okay, that's, in fact, if I remember correctly, that's how Indian stories always go.

ME:
It's true, it's true. (laughs)

AW:
So I guess it's just perfect. (laughs)

ME:
Yeah, you got it right.

AW:
All right, well, I'm going to go ahead and stop it and get on the road. This is so much fun I could stay all the time. Thanks again, Max.

ME:

Well, you're sure welcome.

End of interview



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