

**Oral History Interview of  
Bette Ramsey**

**Interviewed by: Andy Wilkinson  
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## Transcript Overview:

This interview features Bette Ramsey as she discusses her late husband, Buck Ramsey, and his involvement with recording music and the cowboy culture renaissance. In this interview, Bette explains Buck working with another to get his songs recorded, and the gatherings at Elko and Nara Visa

**Length of Interview:** 02:43:58

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### Keywords

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**Andy Wilkinson (AW):**

Okay. This is Andy Wilkinson with Bette Ramsey in one of my favorite houses on the planet, her home in Amarillo. It's the second day of April 2018, late morning. And we're continuing our series of interviews and we had been talking about Buck's book, *As I Rode Out in the Morning*, and whether or not there were extra copies or not, but you mentioned that he had thrown out the plates from that book and that gave you a sense that Buck felt the end was near. Is that?

**Bette Ramsey (BR):**

Well I—when I—you know, after I finally got through the grief journey enough to start thinking back, I started remembering all the different things that Buck had been doing in those last—in that last year and he was doing things that were unusual for him to be doing. That I—you know, that I just thought he was finally settling in and figuring out what he wanted to do, which was part of it because that last year, he had decided that he wasn't going to do as many gigs. He wasn't going to be travelling like almost three hundred days a year. He was going to be more selective in the choices he made of where he was going to perform. And he was going to do some rewrites of different things that he had written earlier.

AW:

The short stories. I know he was always talking about that.

BR:

The short stories. He wanted to get those all rewritten and he wanted to zero in on doing more recording. You know, get the songs and things that he really wanted to do and rerecord some of those things that he had done with Lanny and then do more. But he was doing—and he was—you know, he'd—we'd built the library and he'd gotten all that organized the way he wanted it, where he could settle down and work. But what he did when he started going into the library and reorganizing, his mom had—she had moved to Honey Grove and was not in Amarillo anymore. When she had moved, she had given Buck a lot of the mementos that she had kept for all those years of them moving around and him growing up. She kept everything that Buck ever made for her. Any of the posts, the report cards, and all the little boy stuff. You know, like he had wood burned a little poem on some wood and just things that would mean a lot to a mom and also, to other people, like maybe Amanda, or something. But he was going through all of those boxes of things that his mother had given him and throwing stuff away.

AW:

Really?

BR:

And I said, "Buck, why are you throwing all of these nice, little mementos away? Maybe Amanda or some people would like to have them." He said, "Bette, it's my life. It's my stuff and

I get to choose what I want left behind.” And I said, “Well that’s exactly right. It is your choice.” And so I just let it be, but I was really—you know, some of those things were very endearing things that I know Amanda would’ve liked to have seen because she’s thoroughly enjoyed going through all of his writings and everything and his files, which I’d never gone through. She couldn’t believe I hadn’t, and I thought, well I didn’t want to be intrusive. When he shared something with me for me to read or for him to read to me, I was always happy, but I didn’t go snooping around in his files, his personal files, or anything. The only thing that I ever went through to find was when Ramblin’ Jack was—I mean, when he got that nomination to nominate somebody for the medal of the arts. I wanted to—I knew he would’ve nominated Ramblin’ Jack. And went through and found the folder. That neat letter that he had written for him to send that in.

AW:

So at about the same time, he threw away the plates that had been returned to you by Texas Tech Press?

BR:

All the book stuff, yeah. He threw away all that stuff. Any of the books and there were some other things.

AW:

He threw away the books he had bought?

BR:

No. He didn’t throw away the—but there were some other things in the files that Tech had.

AW:

Like drafts?

BR:

Yeah, of different things.

AW:

Rewrites, yeah.

BR:

Yeah. There was a box of stuff and most of all that was thrown away. Yeah, so there—and maybe all of—I don’t know about the political campaign stuff. Probably, a lot of that got thrown away. There’s still some that I sent into Tech, but just things he didn’t—things he wanted to have around. But he was also doing other things, Andy, like with his sisters and family and just when I

look back, I think he must've known. I kind of think people have a sense of their last days. I'm relating this some to Mr. Ramsey, who started writing on a calendar every day. When he was in his last stages of life, he started—you know, he started writing. He had a big calendar and he'd get up in the mornings and write the time and what time the sun came up and a little bit about what he did that day and then he started kind of recording different things.

AW:

Really?

BR:

Yeah.

AW:

How long before he passed away did he start that?

BR:

It was—well that calendar thing, I think, was pretty much like a year or so, but the recordings were—you know, they—I don't know what happened to those recordings, but they were like maybe the last few months. Of course, he had retired and part of it was he had time to do things like that. But I just—when I stop and think about it and then Buck was reading. You know, sitting by the fire reading a lot and just doing—reflecting—doing things that he hadn't been that attentive to and so I started thinking he must've known that his time was limited. Maybe not as soon as his time was limited, but I think he probably could tell. There were probably things happening in his body that he could sense.

AW:

Yeah. We—I think we're all a lot more sensitive to our body than we're willing to admit or able to understand, necessarily. But you can tell, especially when you look backwards.

BR:

Yeah, so.

AW:

Well I had notes from the last time we talked. Three things that we wanted to talk about this time if we could get around to them. One was Elko and the Cowboy Culture Movement. And then recording with Lanny. And then the China trip.

BR:

Oh my gosh. Yeah.

AW:

Yeah. So which is the shortest of those? You think, the recording?

BR:

Probably the recording.

AW:

Let's start with that. That kind of fits in with—you just mentioned that he wanted to redo.

BR:

Yeah. What happened with he and Lanny, I think Buck—in the beginning, he and Lanny—I don't know who approached who. I think it was probably Lanny approaching Buck wanting to do somethings.

AW:

I'm pretty sure it was.

BR:

And Lanny was a musician, but Buck felt like he—and Lanny trained as a musician, I guess, because he played with the—didn't he play with the symphony some in Lubbock?

AW:

Yeah. Well Lanny—here's a short synopsis of Lanny—Lanny was like Buck and myself. To begin with, a self-taught musician and he played rock and roll and then he moved out to Nashville and he played and he discovered blues as a young man, like a lot of us did, and became very enamored to that. He learned to play acoustic guitar. Not just electric guitar. He wound up doing some really important session work. Like he plays rhythm guitar on some of those early Jimmy Buffet albums.

BR:

Oh, I didn't know that.

AW:

Yeah. And then his hearing got to be an issue and so he left all that, moved back to Lubbock, and never played that was amplified again. You know, from then on, played acoustic music and he took up the violin and went back to school or went back to learn the violin formally and he played that and was active in that and then began his roots music show. About the same, got interested in—because of violin and fiddle music and he got to know Frankie. And formed—Lanny formed his ranch dance fiddle band. It was through all that that he became aware of Buck, as I understand it, and that's where the connection got made. Lanny was—he'd been very

interested in this with Frankie. Not only Frankie, but our friend from Ruidoso. My mind just went blank. Who—cowboy and started that Ruidoso swing festival.

BR:

Oh yeah. I know who you're talking about.

AW:

Yeah. And so Lanny had this real interest in preserving that music, you know? And so—and he had started a recording studio in his home. First, in his mother's home and then he moved it across the street to his home. Literally across the street. And began, in earnest, recording a variety of people and Buck was one of those. Now, he—I think he met Frankie first, before Buck, because he had to learn about Buck from someplace and I think fiddle and Frankie is how he got to that.

BR:

Well I know he may've seen Buck performing, you know, at that cowboy poetry thing because Buck—

AW:

The Lubbock?

BR:

The Lubbock thing.

AW:

Yeah.

BR:

Because Buck and JB performed. That's where we met JB was in—

AW:

That's where I met Buck that first year.

BR:

Yeah, because Buck was going there and performing. That's where I remember seeing JB for the first time and meeting up with them. I know Lanny knew about Frankie. I know Lanny was interested in recording, but I know he was learning about recording and I know that—and I am grateful to Lanny in some ways because Buck never took himself seriously as a musician or a poet. His whole life, you know, he just kind of dabbled around here and there. He never took himself seriously as a very smart person. I mean, he always—it was easy for him. Everything

was so easy for him because he got it so quickly. He'd been going to school in that two room school and been listening to all those eighth grade people being taught when he was, you know, like maybe in the first grade. And so he just thought that everything was simple. In school, he never—I don't think he ever really cracked a book, studied about anything. I think he just went in and absorbed and did it and that was that. It took—and Lanny was so discerning and so critical and so precise, it nearly drove Buck crazy. Absolutely crazy. But he made Buck hone in and redo and redo. That just absolutely—Buck would get so frustrated because he'd want to go in and do it one time and be done with it because he had been that way all his life. He'd go in and if he had to write a theme for the semester, he'd go in and sit down and write it. Turn it in. That's what I realized when I went to graduate school. I thought, I have to read and reread and study and work and rewrite and redo. This guy, you know, he just goes through—anyway, it was—that was Buck. I think where they had the major disagreement was when Buck had written, "As I Rode Out in the Morning." Lanny had nothing to do with that, but Lanny, maybe spoke to Tech because he lived in Lubbock and he knew some of those Tech people and maybe had worked with them on something or other and talked about Buck's book. Lanny thought he deserved half of everything that Buck ever did.

AW:  
Financially?

BR:  
Yeah. That's when Buck just said, "Wow. No. You had nothing to do with this. This is mine. Was mine. So no." And then that caused a big blowup between the two of them and part of it is both of them were stubborn and weren't willing to sit down and negotiate or anything.

AW:  
Yeah. They were from two different planets.

BR:  
Yes.

AW:  
Because at that time, each of them called on me to be sort of a mediator and I found that impossible.

BR:  
Exactly. Yeah.

AW:  
I couldn't get any traction in any way.

BR:

And I got Eddy Reeves whenever Buck died. You know, Lanny wouldn't work with me. All I wanted was to know what Lanny had that Buck had done in those last months or years or whatever that hadn't been produced and out there on the market. My whole sense of everything, Andy, has been—still is—I never have been out to make money for me. I thought it would've been nice if Amanda could've had something from whatever he left as his legacy and I still do, but I never cared about—I knew Buck didn't care about making money. I knew he wanted to write and sing and have his things out there for the people. That's what I wanted. That's the only reason I wanted to try to get the Buck redone because I knew Buck didn't like that first book. I just wanted it to be out there for people that wanted to read in libraries, in schools, in places. I've given books to schools and libraries and I would love to have that be a project where his books are in libraries. I don't care about—and for kids, particularly, that live in the west. I would really like to and I'm going to start out trying this if I can financially do it, just to buy whatever books are still left, buy a box of them, give them to the folk life center to start giving to poets and people like that that come to the folk life gathering. And for people, if they have a book or don't want the book, to just give it to the library in their area. I think that's a good project.

AW:

I remember Buck talking a lot about wanting books to be cheap enough that an ordinary, working-for-wages cow puncher could afford one. And small enough that they'd fit in a pocket.

BR:

In a pocket, yeah. He wanted to do some of those pocket books.

AW:

Yeah, which kind of attracted him to Gib Smith at the outset because Gib Smith was doing those little small books. Do you remember that?

BR:

Yeah. And he also—there is—and I'll show that to you. There's a pocket. Somebody did a pocket glossary of what Buck wrote the glossary for. I've got a copy of it. I think I copied it offline.

AW:

Is that the book of the German photographer? You know, Andy Hedges got a copy of that book the other day where he shot pictures of cow punchers and Buck wrote a glossary of cow punch terms to go in the end of that book.

BR:

You're talking about—

AW:

[Phone buzzing] I don't have to get that.

BR:

It's a book.

AW:

Yeah. It's a really expensive book.

BR:

It's a very expensive—I gave that book to the western folk life center. We had the table top one and then he did a smaller one.

AW:

Oh. Now, all I know is the tabletop one. That's what Andy Hedges has, the big one.

BR:

Andy Hedges has that great big one?

AW:

Yeah, because he corresponded with this fellow. In fact, this guy wanted to see if we, at the Southwest Collection, were interested in buying his photographic collection and we were, but he was also talking with another institution, who had some money. We were going to have to go out and raise the money because they were good photographs.

BR:

They are good photographs.

AW:

But we couldn't do it in time so he sold it, but in that process, Hedges corresponded with him and was interested in the glossary. You know, he just wanted a copy of the glossary. The photographer said, "Well I have a damaged copy of the book. I'll just send it to you." So he sent it to him.

BR:

Sent him a damaged copy of the big book?

AW:

Yeah. The big book. But we looked and looked. The two of us looked and couldn't find the damage. It was a really great copy, but I don't think Hedges—I know I don't know about a

smaller version of this.

BR:

Well the guy—this guy—his name was Hall something. Something Hall. Turn that off a minute. Let me go get that—

AW:

Yeah, I'll pause it.

BR:

--glossary that I have.

AW:

Yeah. I'd like to see it because it's a good thing to talk about because it's early. It's before the Elko. Whoop. Sorry. [Pause in recording]

BR:

I don't know who did that. It looks like a cartoonist did that.

AW:

All right. Yeah. Bette just brought me a thing called a cowboy pocket glossary by Buck Ramsey. Art by Doug Chance. It's—as Bette was mentioning as I turned on the machine, the illustrations, the art, are cartoons. And not what you'd call western art, per say. It looks—it came out in *Accent West Magazine*. That's what it says here.

BR:

Oh. Is that where it came from?

AW:

With instructions on how to pull or cut out pages 49 through 52. "Cut along perforated lines and piece together numerical sequence and staple together. Stick it in your pocket and look for a cowboy to impress." That's what the instructions say. It's February of 1983. *Accent West*. So is this connected? Bette, do you think? To that photographer's?

BR:

It's Douglas Kent Hall, who's the guy that did the big book. I think that's—

AW:

Yeah. That's not the person that I'm talking about.

BR:

It isn't?

AW:

No. This is a German fellow and it was a glossary was—let's see. You mentioned Douglas—let me hand that to you—Douglas Kent Hall?

BR:

Okay. Douglas Kent Hall.

AW:

Because this is Douglas Chance that did the—

BR:

Okay. Yeah, Douglas Kent Hall is the one that did this. He was—this is the story that I remember. He was living in New York City and doing photography and he was in a bar in New York City and ran into some wealthy Texas ranchers and they got to talking. They were drinking together and they got to talking about, you know, photography and they got to talking about their ranches. They—I could be mistaken, but I think they pretty much commissioned or highly encouraged Douglas Kent Hall to come to Texas and photograph their ranches. So there is a big tabletop book.

AW:

I'm going to look up and see if I have.

BR:

That I donated. Mary—not Mary. Meg would know about it because I gave it to her. It's a beautiful book with all these photographs of ranches around Texas and New Mexico area. The Trig Ranch. There's some of cowboys sitting on barstools in Mosquero. There's one of R.W. Hampton's first marriage with him riding through the country in a wagon.

AW:

Yeah. I remember seeing those.

BR:

Yeah. So anyway, that's this big, expensive tabletop book. At the time, I know it was over a hundred dollars for that book and that was I don't know how many years ago. Well that was an extensive. I think this glossary—I think Buck started figuring out that people didn't really know what a lot of cowboy terms meant and so he wrote a glossary and this was probably the first one. And then he did an extended one for Douglas Kent Hall's book. The glossary was in those great

big tabletop books. But when Douglas Kent Hall did a smaller version of his book that would sell better in bookstores and everything, it was a smaller tabletop book. The one I'm talking about was about this big, but then there was a smaller version that he did and the glossary was not in that because he probably didn't want to share the—

AW:

Having to pay Buck.

BR:

Having to pay Buck anything for that little book. But then in the book that our friend in Elko and his name isn't coming to me right away, that taught at the University of Utah. You know who I'm talking about.

AW:

I'm having trouble thinking. University of Utah?

BR:

Yeah. I think he taught at the University in Salt Lake City. He married Nan. You gave them a wedding gift of a painting or something.

AW:

Oh. The—

BR:

What's his name?

AW:

The Folklorist.

BR:

Yes.

AW:

Yes. Actually, they bought that painting of mine in a--

BR:

Oh, they bought a painting.

AW:

It was an auction for a folk life center. We all sent in some.

BR:

Okay. They bought your painting.

AW:

Right. This is not our morning for remembering names, is it?

BR:

It isn't, is it? What's his name?

AW:

Oh, and he did this nice book. It was one of the first of those books that anybody did.

BR:

Yeah. A really nice book that took a long time. Buck wrote an article for it. I don't know. A bunch of people. But there's kind of a glossary in that. Well it was about cowboy terms. Buck wrote that article about cowboy terms.

AW:

Yeah. That was a little later. The thing that impressed me about this and I just sent a text message to Andy Hedges to get him to tell me the name of this other book. It predated—well this predated Elko. This is 1983. And that other glossary.

BR:

Is it by Buck?

AW:

Yes, it's by Buck.

BR:

Well then does Buck even know about that? I don't know about it.

AW:

I would assume he knew about it. The photographer talked like he had talked to Buck. Now, whether he had—what I'm trying to figure out is this one and that the same thing?

BR:

I have no idea. You'll have to compare. But I have no idea, unless—the only thing I can think of is that Janie—dadgummit—Frisco was living in Germany at the time. She may have known some German photographer.

AW:

Well he actually lived in the US.

BR:

Oh, he lived in the US?

AW:

Yeah, and lived in New York. But he's not Douglas Kent Hall. No, his—and I thought I had him in my phone directory here, the directory in my phone, but I don't. So I'll find out from Andy Hedges. But maybe before we leave, I'll try to get a copy of this.

BR:

You can take this if you want to take this. I'm going to send this whole notebook to Southwest Collections. If you want to take it, you're welcome to take it because it's got all kinds of stuff in it.

AW:

Okay. Well I could take that and then I can get with Andy Hedges and I'll get the copy of that book and we'll compare these glossaries because, you know, since one of the things on our list is to—[phone buzzes] I don't know who this is. I'll ignore it. One of the things we're going to talk about today was Elko and the—Buck's renewed interest in the music and the poetry, the traditional materials. And so it's very interesting to me that this glossary, as least this one for sure is before he went to Elko. Like what was his first year in Elko? Eighty-seven? Eighty-six? Because Elko started in '85.

BR:

I think his first year was—Amanda thinks it was '88.

AW:

Oh. Martin Schreiber.

BR:

Oh. Martin Schreiber. I do know Martin Schreiber.

AW:

Yeah. Okay. That's the book we're talking about.

BR:

Okay. Martin Schreiber. I'd forgotten about him. I can't remember him. I don't remember. I do know that name. Yeah. He must've—Martin Schreiber. I'm going to have to refresh my memory

on him. I remember the name. I remember him being around. I'm wondering if he met Martin. I'm wondering if he met Martin someway through Warren Burnett because that's real familiar.

AW:

It's a beautiful set of photo.

BR:

Yeah. That must be—yeah. It may have had some connection with Warren Burnett. It seems like that might've been a way because Warren got around more than Buck and knew lots of people, but I don't remember a book that he did.

AW:

I'm asking when that book was printed. I told him about this 1983—I'm going to set this on top to be sure we get it.

BR:

I have no idea.

AW:

Yeah.

BR:

Where he ran into this guy, but you know.

AW:

Well that is likely to have been orchestrated by the *Accent West Magazine*.

BR:

Yeah. I think when Buck was writing, doing some—

AW:

We had this guy and here's a guy that can write it and we got this guy that can do the illustrations because those aren't the illustrations Buck would've picked.

BR:

No. He wouldn't have. Buck—that's when Buck—he was doing some of that stuff when he was writing. Like '83. That was when Buck wasn't—he didn't have a job, I think. He'd been—he had worked for the newspaper, but they told him he couldn't go to some political rally and of course, he went. It was something to do with segregation, integration, all of that. I don't know. It was

some—there was some—the newspaper was trying to tell him that he couldn't go to this black political rally going on. Buck wasn't going to let them stop him doing what he believed in.

AW:

Yeah, he wasn't going to have any of that.

BR:

So he didn't work for the newspaper after that. I think he was writing just independently for—and that may've been when he was working on—

AW:

Yeah. Because he—when I first met Buck, he was still doing his counterpoint columns.

BR:

Yeah. Well he did that later after he—

AW:

After he quit working as a journalist, a reporter.

BR:

After he'd quit working as a journalist. But when he wasn't working, yeah, as a reporter. But then he was doing independent things for—well he did some writing for that thing in Austin. That paper that came out that had a lot of political writing that Molly Ivins—. <sup>1</sup>

AW:

*The Chronicle?*

BR:

It wasn't *The Chronicle*. It was that little—

AW:

Oh. Now, so how did this fit in the time when he was working with Hightower too? He was on the staff and he was going to do a—Buck was charged with writing the history of the Texas Department of Agriculture. Buck and I talked about that a lot and he didn't have a copy of it. When he left that outfit, he didn't get to take his or they were in the process. They were going to do something with it. I took it on myself to try to get a copy and had zero luck getting anybody down there to even talk to me about it. So I never have come up with that, but I would really love to find that because Buck was proud of that piece of writing. He talked about it to me several times.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Texas Observer*

BR:  
Well.

AW:  
He said that Martin Schreiber had sent Hedges some more stuff. He had all the cowboys he photographed write out answers to a set of questions. Now, he wants to put those in a book. Joel and Nelson and some other people wrote things for—anyway, so I'll—

BR:  
I'll find out what the connection with Martin was. I mean, how he met Buck. Maybe Andy could do that.

AW:  
Yeah.

BR:  
Or who? How he got? Because I don't know. I just remember the name Martin. I remember him coming over, but I can't place any more about him other than—and I didn't know he had done a book, but maybe that's something that I just am not remembering because it's not—I remember the name.

AW:  
Yeah. Well I'll—

BR:  
And I think I remember him coming around, but that's about as far as it goes right now.

AW:  
Great. Well.

BR:  
I'd like to know the year it was published.

AW:  
Well he didn't have it with him at his office, but he said it was around that same time, '83.

BR:  
Around '83. So we would've been in this house.

AW:

Um-hm. Well and I just—I'm willing to bet that this glossary from *Accent West* and—

BR:

And Martin's are the same.

AW:

The same. Yeah, and so I'm going to—

BR:

I bet they are.

AW:

So Hedges is going to—when I get back, we'll sit down and compare them.

BR:

And look and see. Yeah.

AW:

And then I think Hedges also knew a little bit about how Martin and Buck got to know each other.

BR:

Okay. Good.

AW:

And so I'll find that out and let you know.

BR:

Yeah, find out because then it might trigger my memory to remember more.

AW:

Yeah. Now, let's hold on this just a second and let me just ask, do we have anything more to talk about with Lanny?

BR:

Well just that their disagreement was—you know, Buck was very upset about all of that.

AW:

Yeah. I mean, really upset.

BR:

He was extremely upset and when Buck got upset, he was pretty non-forgiving about things, and Lanny too. Both of them had stubborn personalities and ego. You know, both. It was ego and stubborn personalities. Buck just was upset and I finally said, "Buck, just forget about the recordings you've done with Lanny that he will not give you access to." Because the other thing, they had a disagreement that I remember that they had a disagreement about that I didn't know. Well there was several that came up after the initial book thing. One of them was Buck wanted to do some recordings with his sisters for familial reasons. And Lanny wouldn't agree to that. Lanny felt like that Donna and his little friend—and they were really good, but he felt like that's who he ought to stay with. You know, there's nothing any better than sibling harmony.

AW:

Oh yeah. Well plus the history of the Ramsey sisters.

BR:

Yeah. And his sisters had amazing voices. He really, especially in those latter days, that's another thing he wanted to do was to do some recordings with his sisters. He did that Christmas waltz thing, but he had planned on getting together with them and doing other things. He wanted to do some things with Frankie. There is a recording somewhere and I think maybe Andy Hedges has that. With him instructing Frankie on what he wanted to do with this fiddling thing. It might've been with that fiddling—

AW:

Yeah, the album.

BR:

That album. That fiddling album that you finished.

AW:

Yeah, that I to—yeah. And I was with Buck when he went to visit Frankie in the hospital here in Amarillo after Frankie's horse wreck. That was a really interesting experience to go to the hospital. I would never have gotten into see Frankie, but here I was with Buck in a wheelchair and so no one was going to stop us, you know? And we rolled in there and it was in ICU. I mean, this was right—

BR:

Yeah. When they wouldn't let anybody.

AW:

Yeah, and there were wires and tubes and everything and we rolled up and Buck reached over and patted Frankie on the hand and said, "Frankie, it's Buck. It's Buck." You know? And Frankie was in—he wasn't in a coma, but he, you know, pretty much out of it. All he said was he rolled over and he said, "Tell them to quit feeding that son of a bitch and he won't ever come back." Talking about the horse. [Laughter] And then he went right back into his coma so we had to leave. So Buck said on the way out, he said, "Well I think he's going to be all right." Talking about Frankie. But I remember, you know, one of the things that Buck was talking to Frankie about was that Frankie, although Lanny had done an album with Frankie and published it because it shows them on the front porch of that house up there. That ranch house he stayed at. That he was—Frankie was never very happy with that way of recording either. So Buck was talking to him about how they wanted to record. He wanted to record that Canadian river breaks fiddle tradition album. And so I know that was happening because it wasn't—you know, by the time—then Buck died. And then Frankie wasn't recovered enough to play when we did the recording and so I had to go back up afterwards to Frankie's house and I stayed the night, which was an ordeal because he—Frankie and his wife smoked like chimneys.

BR:

It's terrible.

AW:

They had a nice little room for me. It had a bathroom. But I had to, when I first went in there to go to bed that night, I had to stuff towels under the door. It was just awful.

BR:

I know. I remember going to visit. It was horrible. It's like one right after the other.

AW:

But we recorded. We got this great recording. Because I just set up a mic and we let Frankie talk and talked about taters and sandy ground and talked about fiddle playing and he just played and talked and then we went back to the studio and cut out the parts we didn't want. So it came out really well. Well that's exactly what Buck had been talking to—

BR:

Frankie about doing.

AW:

Yes, and that's the way Buck wanted to do the Canadian river breaks project and so when we got it going. You know, after Buck had died and it was—and I wound up getting the job to do it. We—because Buck and I had talked about it—so we did that same thing. We set up the

recording and we had that great guy come down from the Smithsonian. Pete Reiniger. And he set up his recording equipment there in a schoolhouse in Tascosa and we—that's the way we recorded. People just came in and played. And so we did all that because that's the way Buck wanted it done and a lot of that came right out of this disagreement with Lanny and the, "Let's do twelve takes and put a take together from little bits and pieces of the twelve." And Buck was philosophically opposed to that. Not just he didn't like working that way, but he was just opposed to it from right at the beginning of it. I think so was Frankie. So that was kind of interesting. Now, a question that I have is—I don't remember talking to Buck about this. I don't remember what he said, so I don't have that to draw on from my memory. But I know that you and I have talked about Buck having other recordings he'd done with Lanny that weren't included in either of those two records and so we've got, or getting, and I think we've gotten most of it. Of Lanny's collection. Lanny's archive of recordings. And I asked Lanny about any un—recorded pieces, but that had never been released of Buck's and he said, "There weren't any."

BR:

That's not true.

AW:

So what? Do you have any like cassettes or examples or any?

BR:

I have no—when Buck died, I went to Lanny. I know Buck had recorded some songs when they finally had their final big to do. What happened and that I didn't realize is that on that second tape that Buck did that had the "Saw Bossy Saw." The big dispute was that song. Lanny did not want that song and he wouldn't agree to do a CD of that tape because of that song. I didn't realize that until much, much—

AW:

So "Saw Bossy Saw" is not on the CD?

BR:

There's no CD. Lanny wouldn't have that tape ever.

AW:

Now, "Rolling Uphill from Texas," was that?

BR:

"Rolling Uphill from Texas" was the first album.

AW:

And so the second cassette?

BR:

“My Home, It was in Texas.” The second cassette never got to be a CD because “Saw Bossy Saw” was on it so it was never in CD form and that was a big disagreement because Buck wanted it in CD form because everybody was going to CD’s instead of tapes. CD’s lasted better. Lanny wouldn’t agree to that becoming a CD.

AW:

Because that song was on there?

BR:

Yes. It was over “Saw Bossy Saw” and I didn’t know that. I think—I don’t know if it was Lanny that told me. I think it was, eventually. But when I went to Lanny and asked him—because Buck had done some recordings and I—from what I—it seemed like Buck had maybe done seven songs or something. I’m not sure if there were that many, but I went back and asked Lanny what he had and Lanny wouldn’t let me have access to anything. And then years later, he came to me with his wife and this was—he had softened a little bit and wanted—

AW:

This was the wife that’s a doctor?

BR:

Yeah. Wanted to meet with me about—he had had—he wanted me to come. Well no, he’d softened a little bit and he wanted me to know something or try to work something out. And then later, he called me and I think this is after he had had the health issues. The stroke or something, I’d heard. I didn’t know what issues he’d had. He’d just said he’d had some health issues, but he couldn’t drive anymore and was having to stay around and this is after they moved to the San Antonio area.

AW:

To Bernie?

BR:

Yeah, to Bernie. And he wanted to do—set up a website or something and then I got to where I couldn’t. There was something happening with my life and I couldn’t go for whatever reason. I don’t know what we were doing. I have no idea. But I couldn’t go. And then the internet started exploding with everything and people started—all these different things started coming out. Pandora and all this other stuff, where recordings of Buck were getting put on the internet

without me even knowing about them. People would—family members or somebody would find something and let me know and I still don't know. I don't know about Spotify. I don't do Pandora or Spotify, all that stuff. You know, it's just because I'm not that much of a techno geek, but it was all out there anyway so what was the point? Well now, there's probably not a point.

AW:

Yeah, because you can't sell them and get your money back.

BR:

You can't do anything anyways so it doesn't matter, but.

AW:

Well historically, I would sure like to have those other recordings if we can.

BR:

If—you know, and Lanny—you know, I—those last whatever. Anything that came from any sales or anything, I just told Lanny to use to preserve the earlier things in a better form. He said there was some way to preserve things better than those tapes or whatever he had and I just said, "Whatever was my—that would've come to Buck, to just use that money, and do whatever you needed to do with that." As best I remember because I don't think there was ever any much of any money coming from anything.

AW:

Right. And all the tape that—cassettes and things you had of Buck's, we have now, right? At Southwest Collection?

BR:

I think you have mostly everything that I had. I think. Unless there's something in there that I haven't given.

AW:

Well the only reason I'm asking is that we went through those and we don't have anything other than stuff we know about from Lanny. So if you have others, keep an eye out for it. Any of the things that might've been the unrecorded or unreleased, but recorded.

BR:

Yeah, see, when the Smithsonian did those things, I went through everything and sent Elko all the stuff, which was on all those things that I think you all have those.

AW:

Yeah, I think we do.

BR:

And I think Andy Hedges, I think, got a copy of them because I think the archivist sent Andy all the stuff.

AW:

Yeah.

BR:

But I can't—unless somebody else, some family member has something that I don't know about that they taped somewhere.

AW:

Oh, no. I was thinking, specifically, if you come across any like rough demos or things of—other things that were recorded with Lanny that didn't make it to either.

BR:

I never—I don't think Lanny ever gave Buck any of the demo stuff. I think Lanny—

AW:

Okay. Typically, in a recording situation, they'll send you, you know. Back in that time period when I was recording with whomever, you would get a copy of—and it would be marked 'rough demo,' just for you to listen to and say, about the mixes, and things like that. It would be a cassette.

BR:

I think Buck just did that in person with Lanny. I don't think—

AW:

While he was there? Okay. Well I was just curious.

BR:

Lanny ever—Lanny hung onto things. He was pretty—pretty—Buck called him, “anal-retentive” about things. Yeah, he didn't trust people. But that's another thing, you know, Buck got to where he didn't want to go play with Lanny because of the way Buck did. He kept telling Lanny he was more of an individual artist than somebody. But I think he felt like Lanny—what did he call it? He was a certain kind of musician. A wrote. He learned by wrote, I think is what Buck said.

Buck said, "That's not—he doesn't pick up on things quick enough." Or something. I don't know. That was part of it.

AW:

Yeah. They were pretty much oil and water. I remember when we went up to Denver and played at this really hip, new-age place downtown. It was so cold and Joe Stevenson met us there and Lanny and Buck and I rode up and I don't know if Amanda rode up with us. Someone else was in the van with us, but the oil and water thing. Here was Buck and his hat and his chair. You know, playing. It was cold. Lanny's wearing a Toboggan cap. I think it may have been orange and fingerless gloves and played the fiddle. It was quite the contrast. You know, just visually, you could say these are two people not on the same page. Although, to his credit, Lanny really didn't belong in cowboy hat so.

BR:

No, he didn't. No. No, and I always—you know, I always got along with Lanny and liked him a lot and I was—but when he wouldn't share anything, it was just—that was kind of mind boggling.

AW:

Well.

BR:

I ultimately told Buck just to rerecord everything that he had done with Lanny.

AW:

Yeah. We had talked about that.

BR:

I said, "Just quit harboring all that. It's not doing you any good. You can't get it resolved." I said, "Just drop it and rerecord everything that you recorded with him."

AW:

And I think that was part of the Canadian River Breaks project was Buck was going to be singing on those, you know?

BR:

Uh-huh. Yeah.

AW:

And of course, he couldn't do that. So but I know that he'd kind of resolved that he was going to just rerecord.

BR:

I didn't know Buck was going to be singing.

AW:

Yeah, not on everything. Some of those are, you know.

BR:

Some of those he was going to do.

AW:

Well there—he would've just produced it and they were instrumentals that didn't have vocals. But there were plenty of things that would've had vocals. I think he would've done that.

BR:

Vocals. Yeah, he would've sung that. Well I don't know. I remember he wanted to do "Will you come to the Bower?" I know that and I think he did record that, but I don't know that. I have no idea. I don't know if any of it lasted.

AW:

Well we were going to do a project on Buffalo. Buffalo songs. We went over to this little recording studio on the west side of town that was in this odd place that people would actually go in and out of the backdoor in the middle of your session.

BR:

Was it at Carlos's?

AW:

Yeah. While you were recording, they'd walk in and go to their office right through your recording session. It was.

BR:

Yeah.

AW:

And we got Amanda there to sing a song that I'd written. "Last Buffalo Hunt." And then Buck had recorded "Shoot the Buffalo," the song.

BR:

I sort of remember that. I was—I think I was there.

AW:

And we'd talked about Cody, the museum at Cody that Buffalo Bill was thinking about funding.

BR:

*The Buffalo* album.

AW:

*The Buffalo* album. We—that's another one we just never did get done, but so I know all that was after—

BR:

After the Lanny deal.

AW:

Yeah, split up with that.

BR:

Yeah, Buck was doing—you know, finally, had come to—but the other thing that happened when Buck died is—and Lanny wouldn't work with me on anything. I had Eddy Reeves go talk to Lanny, and Eddy Reeves did go talk to Lanny about, you know, the stuff that Buck had already done. What belonged to me, that I was the legal person for that and was trying to tell Lanny that he should recognize that. You know, that I had the legal rights to those things. Not him. Even though, they were in partner. I don't know. Anyway, Eddy, on the way home, Eddy said, "Bette, I have negotiated contracts." He started naming all these famous people that he had negotiated contracts for at—

AW:

Was it Warner?

BR:

At Warner Brothers. He said, "None of those people that I have worked with on any of those contract ever took as many hours as I spent with that man trying to talk to him." You know, because Eddy read the contract and was trying to.

AW:

Was he—was Eddy—but Eddy was ultimately unsuccessful.

BR:

He was so frustrated with Lanny over all of it. I don't know what. But then when Lanny came with his wife, he—I don't know. I don't know where he is now, but it's all—you know, when he got so stubborn, everything went around him. The Smithsonian called me. Yeah, I didn't. I wasn't doing anything. Other people wanted things out there and Lanny was not willing to do anything, you know? And so I just sent him whatever I knew and gave—of course, the western folk life center already had permission to do whatever because Buck had already—they'd given permission for any of his live stuff there so it went on without Lanny.

AW:

Yeah. Well all right. Well we will keep an eye out for—

BR:

Anything.

AW:

Anything that we find in his archival materials that are recordings that aren't the ones that we already—that are—been released, you know?

BR:

Yeah. Well I'm glad that you all are getting all of Lanny's stuff because he did some important stuff.

AW:

Yeah.

BR:

And I think he did Buck a big favor by making Buck give his very best.

AW:

Oh yeah. Yeah.

BR:

You know, and get serious.

AW:

Right. Yeah. Well it's—before we start on the Elko, because I want to get back to this glossary because this puts a new light, to me, on the Elko story, as I always heard it from Buck. It's about 12:20 and if you want—

BR:

Oh okay.

AW:

So if you want to, let's take a break.

BR:

Okay.

AW:

And then we'll have lunch. Call Amanda and we'll have lunch and then we'll come back and do this other.

BR:

Okay. Start all the other stuff.

AW:

Yeah, and I need to call the hotel in Canyon and guarantee my room.

BR:

Time sure flies when you're having fun.

AW:

It is. No, this is good. All right. I'm going to stop the recording and we'll get back after lunch.

[Pause in recording] [Door slams] So this is Andy Wilkinson and Bette Ramsey, again, on the second of April, resuming after a very nice meal of some of the leftovers you're trying to get rid of.

BR:

Yes.

AW:

The clam chowder was terrific. And if we could start with kind of where we left off with the glossary that we were looking at from 1983. Pardon me. And thinking about when Buck got connected with the cowboy culture crowd, which would've been—Elko began in '85 and it was '86 or '87. It was a first or second year. The second or third year.

BR:

No, I think it was more like '88 or '89. Amanda thought it was '88. I thought it was '89, but I'm not real sure, but it was late.

AW:

It could've been '89 and I'll tell you why I'm thinking that because I was recording when I first met Buck at the Cowboy Symposium and I don't think he had been to Elko yet at that first Cowboy Symposium. Had he?

BR:

I think he had been because I think Elko was the first one he went to and the reason I'm saying that is because—I can probably find out because Cindy, my friend.

AW:

Got it. Yeah.

BR:

You know, Ben and Cindy. Cindy is the one that turned Buck on to the Cowboy Poetry Gathering.

AW:

Okay. Now, say again who Cindy is.

BR:

Cindy Scott is a girl that lived in my garage apartment. The very first one I ever had after we redid it and she was a teacher.

AW:

She had a son.

BR:

Yeah, she was a teacher.

AW:

Yeah.

BR:

And she was pregnant when she moved into that apartment and then she had Ben and they lived out there for a couple of years. Cindy was a very good writer. She had been a photojournalist for the Fort Worth newspaper, whichever. I can't remember the names of them.

AW:

*Fort Worth Star Telegram.*

BR:

*Fort Worth Star Telegram*. Yeah, and she was very good and she'd been a political speech writer when she was in Fort Worth. She was a very good writer and she had been teaching at boy's ranch and of course, she was—she taught English, I'm sure. I think she even taught history, but she was like a star graduate from the university in Fort Worth, TCU. I think—I don't—I think she graduated summa or magna from her class and she has since published a couple of really good children's books that the weekly reader picked up one of her children's books several years ago and then another children's book that she wrote ended up becoming a play.

AW:

Really?

BR:

Uh-huh, that has been going around.

AW:

Where is Cindy now?

BR:

Cindy is in that Fort Worth area and she's retired from public school teaching, but she is back doing some teaching because she's always worked with troubled kids and been wonderful with them and she's doing some kind of extra—I don't exactly—tutoring kind of something and it may be with university students now or at least college students because of the situation here now. The economic situation, when retired school teachers are not getting the right deal from the teaching world and the medical stuff is all crazy and I mean, it's just been hard to try to retire.

AW:

Yeah. Do you have contact information for her?

BR:

Yeah.

AW:

Let's think about it. I'd like to interview her too.

BR:

Oh, would you?

AW:

Yeah. I sure would.

BR:

Okay. Well she would be wonderful to talk to, but she's the one that told Buck all about—I think Buck had already started. I think Mrs. Robertson, that they used to own Robertson's Meat Market and they had twelve kids and all of them, extremely bright. They've all done amazing things. Mrs. Robertson is the one—she was teaching poetry classes at Amarillo College and Buck started taking her poetry class and she's the one that convinced Buck that he truly was a poet.

AW:

Now, this was in the eighties?

BR:

Yeah. And this is when he came in and said, "You know, Bette, I'm a poet." He said, "I'm a poet." He said, "I'm just like this pretty flower that hasn't been able to bloom."

AW:

Yeah. I think he and I talked about her and she's—

BR:

Yeah, she was just wonderful.

AW:

She's died.

BR:

She died. Yeah, she died. But her children of all—I mean, they're all doing wonderful things, but she and her husband wrote a book about Amarillo, the history of Amarillo. They did all kinds of stuff. Mrs. Robertson was a writer. Some of her grandchildren are. Ellen was like a star person on television and was in charge. Ellen Robertson Green.

AW:

Yeah.

BR:

That's Mrs. Robertson's daughter.

AW:

Oh okay.

BR:

Yeah.

AW:

I'd never put that together.

BR:

Yeah. Well and she's the one that made that great documentary video of Buck that they showed in Elko, you know, about being a cowboy. So anyway, there's so many connections. It's amazing how small of a world it is. But Cindy had seen probably Baxter and Waddy on television.

AW:

Yeah. Tonight Show or whatever.

BR:

The Tonight Show. When they were on and she knew all about the poetry thing and Cindy read Buck's work and knew that it was really good and told him he should apply and he did.

AW:

What would he have written by then? Was *Anthem* done by then?

BR:

No.

AW:

No.

BR:

No. He had written several.

AW:

Notes for a novel, probably.

BR:

Oh no.

AW:

No? Really?

BR:

No. That was later. No. He had just been writing some of that earlier stuff. The—what do you call the—

AW:

Like the funny stuff? The bad job or?

BR:

Well no. He didn't write the bad job until he heard about that brick poem.

AW:

Yeah.

BR:

You know, that Waddy used to do. No, he called it the breaks. Something. The River Breaks Collection. He had been writing those short stories.

AW:

Oh right. The short stories.

BR:

He had been writing the short stories and then he started writing poetry. The River Breaks Collection stuff, you know? With the Dunder [?] [1:10:58] character hanging around Fred and Fair [?] and Tybo Tremain. You know, and all the characters that he knew, which was Fred, Tybo, Jimmy, all these people. He was writing all those different poetry things about all of them and then of course, Mrs. Robertson was encouraging him to do poetry and he would write and go and they'd talk about things. So he was doing all that stuff. I do not know what he sent in first, you know, but I know that the year he got accepted to go, he wrote a poetry. He wrote a poem about going to Elko. You know, that's when Tara [?] [01:11:50] was there and that's in that book that I—I gave y'all his poetry, didn't I?

AW:

I think so.

BR:

Yeah. So it's in that. Everything's in that book, except the one. I found the one about the wolves that I don't think is in that book and I found it. So anyway, that's—but she had encouraged him and he got accepted to go and read his poetry and I am going to tell you that he went and read his poetry because that's what they asked him to do. Then he figured out that everybody else was reciting their poetry and so by the next year. But it was after that first year in Elko that he wrote

*Anthem* because he was so inspired. I mean, he was like—that first year in Elko—I'm going to give you the thing. Were you there when I did that memorial to Buck and I was talking about him writing *Anthem*? I have that in the speech and I found a copy of that speech that I—

AW:

Really?

BR:

Yes, and I'm going to give you a copy of that because I talk about him being on the bus when we were—when we—the first year in Elko, we were on the bus. I mean, we tried to do—you know when you go, you're just so overwhelmed and you're trying to do everything. We tried to kill ourselves getting to everywhere, doing everything. With him performing, as well. And it's like you don't even worry about time or sleep or anything. But on the bus, on that red-eyed bus where everybody was just exhausted and trying to sleep because we caught the bus in the middle of the night to get to Salt Lake City.

AW:

To catch the airplane.

BR:

So we could catch the early airplane out. We were riding on that bus and everybody was conked out on the bus and trying to get some sleep. Well we were in that country and the sunrise came up and Buck started, [loudly] "Look at that!" He was just at the top of his lungs. [Loudly] "Oh, look at that sunrise!" You know? He didn't want anybody to miss the sunrise. I kept saying, [whispers] "Buck, quit. Everybody's trying to sleep." Trying to shut him up and he wouldn't shut up. You know, he was waking everybody on the bus up because he was so excited. Well that's how excited he was about having gone and being just so inspired. But that was Buck because he didn't want anybody to miss a thing of beauty. I can tell you a story. I have got to tell you the story about him coming home two or three times. Whenever he would come home and wake me and Amanda up. I'll tell you about that in a little bit. You want me to tell you about it now?

AW:

Sure.

BR:

Okay. Well another time.

AW:

This is before?

BR:

This is before Buck—this is when Buck was just doing a writing of whatever he could write and be in magazines or whatever. It wasn't when he was working, but it was when Irv was working. He and Irv were doing—they were playing a lot of music together and they were commiserating and talking because Irv was one of—he was like you—he was one of Buck's intellectual people. They could talk and have some of the same mindset and everything about stuff. Irv went to Dartmouth from Amarillo High on a full scholarship.

AW:

Well he was a lot more intellectual than me then.

BR:

On a full scholarship. And they were great friends. They were two that had hitchhiked across the U.S.

AW:

To California?

BR:

Up to Canada and couldn't get across because they didn't have enough money. But Irv was the one that did that. So anyway, and they journaled up and down. So anyway, but there was this ice storm in Amarillo and you've been in Panhandle ice storms. Well this was an ice storm before the leaves had ever dropped off the trees. It was like in September. We just had this big rain and then it all turned to ice. Everything was completely covered in ice. Irv and Buck had been out drinking together and they came in after the bars closed, which would've been like--

AW:

Two.

BR:

Two or something. They came in and woke me up and woke Amanda up and said, "You have got to come get in the car. You have to come see this. It is amazing. It is just amazing. You've got to get up. Amanda has to see this. You have to see this." We got up and got in the car and drove around and it was like a fairyland. Everything. You know, the night lights were on and the stars were out. It was bright. Everything was crystal. It was like a crystal world, just gorgeous. And I'm so thankful that he did that, but I was so tired. Amanda was. But we both—

AW:

So how did you drive around? Just curiously?

BR:

Well we didn't drive around. Irv was driving.

AW:

Wasn't it slick?

BR:

Irv was driving. I have not a clue. He was driving. But Buck went over and that's when the Vineyard's had moved away and were living over on Harrison Street. He went over and made Irv wake the Vineyard's up in the middle of the night because he felt like they should see them. But of course, they were—they didn't get out of bed and see it, but I'm very thankful that we did that. And another time was when we went to a wonderful party and this is Marsh's house, which every party we ever went to there was amazing because she was just—I loved her—she was an amazing lady. The first lady that ever did a beautiful Elm Christmas tree with thousands of lights. Before she did lights, she did tin can lids. That was back in junior high.

AW:

Tin can lids on the tree?

BR:

Tin can lids, you know, glimmer didn't show.

AW:

Oh wow.

BR:

Yeah, it was amazing.

AW:

Say her name again.

BR:

Stanley's mother.

AW:

Oh, Mrs. Marsh.

BR:

Estelle Marsh, yes.

AW:

Yeah, okay.

BR:

Yeah, and I finally wrote her a thank you note for all of the beautiful trees because that's what I loved every—every Christmas, I looked forward to that. Well anyway, Mrs. Marsh had a party and it was a wedding party for somebody. An engagement party or a wedding party. I don't remember. She had all these balloons. These helium filled balloons on all the tables. Well I think she had flowers on the tables, but she had all these helium balloons all out in her yard. It was in the summer and she had them. Just like twenty balloons attached to a brick and they were placed all around in her yard and she had this amazing yard, beautiful yard. It was all at night, but just all these huge clusters of helium balloons at this party. Well Buck and I were usually the last ones to leave most parties and Mrs. Marsh wanted us to go around and gather as many balloons as we wanted to take home to Amanda and some other couples too. Well Buck had me go around and gather up balloons and I had I can't tell you how many balloons. It was probably forty or fifty huge helium filled balloons. We could not put the balloons in the car. We had to drive. Luckily, she didn't live terribly far away from us, but we had to drive down the middle of the streets in Wolflin because the trees curved over the streets and I had to hold the balloons out the window low enough so they wouldn't get caught on the trees, you know? And we had to drive very slow home in the middle of the night. Luckily, there wasn't any traffic. Down the middle of the street to get home and I had to bounce them into this living room. There were enough balloons that they filled the ceiling. They filled up the top of the ceiling. I went in and woke up Amanda and she came in. She was just little, you know? She came in and started rubbing her eyes and looking up at those balloons and we—you know, the strings were long and we'd pull some of them down and we played with those balloons in the middle of the night, bouncing them around and playing with them until all of us got sleepy and went in and went to sleep. Well the next day, Amanda came in the living room. Of course, a lot of the balloons had lost their helium.

AW:

And they had sunk down?

BR:

And they had fallen on the ground, but had a little bit of air in them. And so Amanda gathered up those balloons and unbeknownst to me, this was one of Amanda's usual patterns. She got those balloons and got them out the door, walked over to Mary Anne Vineyard's and rung the doorbell holding all of those balloons and invited herself in to have breakfast with Roy and Mary Anne, which she did, you know, pretty—well when Buck and I slept in, she'd go over and have breakfast with Roy and Mary Anne. So anyway, that was another one of those fun things and I know Amanda remembers and can tell that story probably better than me, but that was Buck. He just wanted people to be on all the wonderful things that we got to do.

AW:

Well there's no question in my mind because I just heard Buck say it so often that the Elko experience certainly propelled him into the mainstream of the cowboy culture renaissance, but also, Buck would say it saved his life. Sometimes, I took that as metaphorical. Other times, I took it as literal. But I'm very interested. The other thing, it was like he marked his life before Middlewell, before the accident and then the next marker was Elko. You know, and coming onto this Martin Schreiber book, about 1983, seeing this article from *Accent West* shows that it wasn't quite that much of a clean mark. That he was already—four or five years before—was really putting a lot of thought and energy into cow punch terminology and the river break stories.

BR:

Yeah, and the thing about—I think what was really Buck's main inspiration were his uncles on his mother's side because they were—you know, Uncle Ed, who was such a wonderful man. When Uncle Ed would come and see us, you know, and talk about—they would talk about all the cowboy stuff and he—Uncle Ed is the one that Buck patterned a lot of the writing and stuff about because he is the one that was the kid that left home when he was about fourteen.

AW:

And he's the one that would show up at Middlewell and sleep in the yard.

BR:

Yes. In the yard. And he's the one—or sleep out on the lawn in Amarillo, Texas.

AW:

Oh really?

BR:

He would walk from the highway. Several miles, you know. He'd get—he'd hitchhike or—well he started out riding a horse across the pastures and then he'd drive his car across the pastures, but he didn't have a car, he'd hitchhike and he'd hitchhike and get somebody to let him off on the highway because, you know. He'd walk I don't know how many miles to the house, and Mr. Ramsey would wake up, there he'd be sleeping out in the yard. But I'll tell you, when I knew him, he had a motorcycle. He called it a motorcycle. He'd bought himself a motorcycle and this was one of the times that he came to see Mrs. Ramsey and Mr. Ramsey. He had that motorcycle and he was really proud of being able to ride that motorcycle around. And so and we had a really nice visit and I just loved him. I loved him being around because he was just the sweetest man in the world. And then the next time I saw him, he didn't have his motorcycle when he came back around, but it was several years later. I said, "Well Ed, what happened to your motorcycle?" And he said, "Well." He said, "You know, I really liked that motorcycle, but I got to where sometimes that motorcycle will fall." He said, "Now, if it would fall with me off it, that was

okay.” But he said, “I got to where when that motorcycle would fall, I was having a hard time picking it back up again.” So he said, “I traded it in for a telescope.” [Laughter] And he had brought a telescope. And of course, we were out looking and we were out looking at all the stars and everything. That was Uncle Ed.

AW:

He traded it for a telescope.

BR:

Yeah. You know, well it is a telescope that you’re looking at the stars. Yeah. So anyway, it was just like—but he is the one that he could do anything with leather. He was a saddle maker and leather man and all that and had a little shop in Chama, New Mexico. But he also could make boats and put them in bottles.

AW:

Really?

BR:

Yes, and he gave us—and I gave it away to somebody. I don’t even remember who now. It was somebody in the family, but he gave us a boat that he had put in Chivas Regal bottle and I had that boat. He also gave us—and I gave that away too to somebody in the family—a little, wooden, perfectly, amazingly carved wood and put together station—not station wagon—stage coach that he had made. An old fashioned stage coach with the buckets and the barrels and everything just like they would’ve been back in the olden days. I probably shouldn’t have given them away. I probably should’ve given them to you for your archive.

AW:

Well especially since you don’t remember who you gave it to.

BR:

I don’t remember who I gave them to, but it was somebody that appreciated stuff like that because I was trying to give it to people that cared about it.

AW:

Is he the one that taught Buck how to braid?

BR:

He’s the one that got him started on doing the braiding and the knot tying and all that and telling him about it, yeah. And so he was the one that was the main inspiration and he’s also the one that

died during all that trial stuff and everything. That was—that made it even worse, you know? The trial that Buck had after his accident.

AW:

Oh, that trial.

BR:

Uncle Ed was in the process of dying.

AW:

Yeah, just because of his age?

BR:

Huh?

AW:

Because of his age?

BR:

Yeah. He had had—he had had some kind of kidney stones or—he had had—he may have had—he had—he may have had a calcified kidney because it—he—the latter part, you know, as he aged, he kind of was walking kind of stooped and he made this leather belt because he was always in pain in his back and it was because of his kidney and I think it had completely calcified or something. You know, from having all the kidney stones and stuff that he never had anything done. Anyway, he had this big, thick leather belt that he had made that he wore on his back all the time. So that was Uncle Ed. But he's the one that's standing there in the front yard with the Holly Hocks on Buck's *My Home, It was in Texas* album. That's Uncle Ed. He was a good looking young man. All of Mrs. Ramsey's brothers were handsome, young men. Mr. Ramsey's brothers weren't so much, but he was. All of Mrs. Ramsey's brothers were and they all did some kind unique things. Like one of the brothers played the bones. Only he played—

AW:

Had three of them?

BR:

Four.

AW:

Four?

BR:

He's the only person. He's in the Smithsonian because he's the only person that played four bones at once, I think.

AW:

Yeah, I've never heard of.

BR:

And they—and he is in the Smithsonian because of that. Somebody came and did something and he was real proud of that, but Mrs. Ramsey's brothers used to send—I think they wrote and they used to send stuff off and they were real proud of showing their pink slips.

AW:

The rejections?

BR:

Yeah. Their rejections. But Mrs. Ramsey wrote poetry. I did not know that.

AW:

Really?

BR:

Yeah, and so it was real interesting to find out and you know, she was—Mrs. Ramsey seemed like more of a simple person because she got married when she was fifteen or sixteen. I think she might've been sixteen and was not an educated person, but I tested her when she was probably in her sixties. You know, because that's when I was a diagnostician and she had an IQ right at—I think it was right at 141 or something. She was not—I mean, people never took her—her kids always thought Mr. Ramsey was, and he was smart. I don't have a clue what his IQ was, but I tested Mrs. Ramsey because I was having—I was practicing. You know, going around and testing people and I thought, wow. This is in her sixties.

AW:

I don't remember Buck ever mentioning about her writing.

BR:

I don't know if he knew that. I did not know that until after she died and the kids were going through things and found some of the poetry that she had written. And so it's just kind of interesting that that would show up and it might've been—she might've been inspired because Buck was writing it and started doing it later in life or something. It was kind of interesting to find that out.

AW:

Did Elko change Buck?

BR:

Yeah. I think what happened to Buck is he found acceptance for himself. For all of his goodness and all of his demons and all of his fallacy. Whatever. Just for being himself. And I think he found a sense of purpose and I think people respected his talent. I think he was frustrated because he had wanted to write and he had been writing. He had been writing all of his life. He used to write all the time, it wasn't—and I guess that's what a real writer—somebody that really wants to write, I think they do writing. They journal. They write. They—Buck was writing poetry in high school. You know, they do stuff. Why is that door doing that? Anyway, it's just when he—and he loved the cowboy—Middlewell was—he loved that. Mr. Ramsey used to talk about. When I would work with Mr. Ramsey, Mr. Ramsey was wonderful. We'd work together and he's really the one that showed me how to work. You know, that you don't just get out there and kill yourself. You take breaks and you prorate your work and all of that. He knew how to do all that and he knew how to do a lot of different things and we would work together out in the yard, in the house. I think he felt like Buck wasn't able to so he helped me a lot and we would talk about Buck. And he said, "You know." He said, "I just got plum ashamed of myself." Have I told you this story?

AW:

I don't think so.

BR:

He said, "I just got plum ashamed of myself." He said, "I used to whip that boy. He'd just go wondering off in those pastures. I wouldn't have a clue where he was. I'd tell that boy not to be doing that." He said, "I finally just gave up." He said, "Because it didn't do one bit of good." And he said, "And he did that even when they moved to town." You know, they moved over there close where the smelter was, but there wasn't any houses out behind or across the road from where they lived. They lived down at the end of the road and it was all pasture and wide open spaces and he'd do that when he lived in town. He'd just go wandering off by himself. So that—he loved all of that. And of course, living in Middlewell, being exposed to all the higher learning and the music. Evidently, those people that taught there were really good singers and loved music, but nobody knew he could sing. None of his family. Choir director in junior high is the one that discovered he could sing. And so it's just that when he—maybe it was the right time for him to be discovered. And I think about—

AW:

You mean, at Elko?

BR:

In Elko. I think about Buck's life and I think, you know, there was so much potential for him to do so many things and for some reason, there would always be something that he would do to mess it up and I don't know if it was because he didn't feel worthy or he didn't feel like he deserved it or he just didn't take himself serious. I'm not sure.

AW:

Yeah, we've talked about this.

BR:

He could've gone to any university, from just his scores. He didn't have—it's like—well that's what I—

AW:

Yeah. We talked about this. You know, he would tell me—in reflective moments, he told me more than once, he said, "You know, I've lived a life of potential. I always had the potential, but I never followed through."

BR:

That's true.

AW:

Now, he would—he never did say why and I never pressed him on it, but I always felt like he was more worried about the downside of success than he was the downside of failure, you know?

BR:

Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

AW:

And I'm not quite sure why. You know, we never discussed that, but I also will tell you that when I first met him and we were getting to know one another, I said, "Where are you from, Buck?" And he said—there wasn't a moment's pause—he said, "I'm from Middlewell."

BR:

That's where he really was happy.

AW:

Yeah. And that's what he said, "That's where I'm from." And it was a long time before I realized how much time he'd spent in Amarillo.

BR:

Exactly.

AW:

And he'd lived someplace else. In Middlewell, they were there what? A couple of years?

BR:

I don't even know how long they were there.

AW:

Wasn't long.

BR:

I think they were there maybe a little longer than a couple, but the thing—I don't think he ever forgave his mom and dad for moving to Amarillo because he was—but yeah. It was—but when you look at the photographs of poor Mr. Ramsey, I mean, Mr. Ramsey looks like a sixty year old man and he was only probably in his forties. Thirties and forties. He looks like one of those Dust Bowl days people. It could've well been the after effect of those Dust Bowl days when they were up in Middlewell and that would've been with all the drought and all the dust storms. Anyway, it was—he just looked like this poor old—and Mrs. Ramsey too. These poor old bedraggled farmers, you know, with all that whole passel of kids and so anyway, that was—but Elko, being around those cowboys and the way they were and treated him and just the whole cowboy culture, he had a lot of respect for that culture and felt like it was the way people should be. And he talked about that. He talked about how—because he had read about those older guys and the way they treated their animals and the way they treated the land and the way they treated each other. You know, which is the right way. You know, you have to have respect and regard for everything. Not just yourself, but you have to have it for life. You know, living things. And I'm talking plants and animals and people and everybody. The world. I think that's what—I really think Buck had a good view of the total picture. The total umbrella. When I think about him and the way he looked at things, I think he just looked at things in totality. I remember him. You know, of course, me in high school, I was little miss dilly bopper butterfly. I didn't give a wit about what was happening politically. I always cared about the people in the world. You know, the starving children in China and the people in Russia that didn't have bread to eat. Things like that, I cared about it. But I just was too busy being miss social butterfly to get too involved with anything and I remember Buck fussing at me because he was always interested in whatever revolution or whatever was happening wherever it was happening and was for the people and the down trodden. He wrote in the school newspaper about things that he felt concerned about, you know, back in those days. He just was—and then he always read and kept up with everything and wanted to know what was going on and so I think he just—and I swear, you know, he just predicted all this turmoil that we're living in today. Scott and I talked about that.

AW:

Scott Brock [?] [1:43:59]?

BR:

Yeah. You know, when I talked to him, he remembered Buck giving us fair warning and *Anthem* has some things about that historically, but it also has about the fair warning of what's coming and he predicted all the corporate America and the takeover and everything that's happening now. I thought, well I'm glad he didn't live to see it, in one way.

AW:

That would kill him.

BR:

I really am because he probably would've had a stroke or something.

AW:

Yeah, that would've killed him.

BR:

Being so angry. But I'm so sorry I didn't listen better.

AW:

Well yeah. I mean, but listening, I mean—you know, it's knowing a tsunami's coming and you're floating on a log in the water and you're just going to have to hang onto the log. You know, you're not going to stop the tsunami. Can we stop just a second to let me change batteries? I see mine are about to run low.

BR:

Yeah.

AW:

Hang on. Because I want to get some more about Elko. So we're taking a temporary break.  
[Pause in recording] Oh, I'd love to.

BR:

He's a really neat guy.

AW:

So we were just talking a little bit about the fellow rebuilding the schoolhouse at Middlewell that was so important to Buck when he was growing up because as he once told me, they gave him

the keys to the library. He got to go—even on Saturdays—go and check out books. Remind me of the fellow's name who's rebuilt that and raised money.

BR:

Well he's—let me think about it—he's the lumberyard guy that I never can think of the lumber—or it's that Texas Lumberyard that I asked you about if you knew about that lumberyard. I think—I don't know if I have him on my—I'm trying to think of his last name. He's also—I think he's like the district attorney in Dumas now.

AW:

Yeah, Dumas. That's it.

BR:

Yeah.

AW:

I think I can look him up with that.

BR:

Yeah, and he's at lumberyard and I can't ever remember the name.

AW:

Ken Shipman.

BR:

Of the lumberyard.

AW:

No, that's—Ken Shipman is at Sunray Schools. Sorry.

BR:

No, it's—it seems like it starts with an L. I don't know if I have his phone number or not.

AW:

I have it somewhere, but I can't find it right off the top of my head. In any case, I can look it up.

BR:

Yeah, you can look it up. I don't know if I have it anymore. As it's turned out, he's a landlord of—Terry's daughter's a school teacher in Dumas and he's her landlord. We figured that out. She was talking about this guy that was really a neat landlord and said something about his name

and I said, "Is his last name something?" And she said, "Yeah." I said, "I know who he is." Said, "He is a nice man." But anyway, he said he was inspired to redo that school because of Buck's poetry.

AW:

Yeah. We had a nice talk about that over the phone.

BR:

Yeah.

AW:

Well I will look it up. I'll find it.

BR:

Yeah, look it up because I can't. I'm sorry. His name is not coming to my mind now. I keep wanting to say Longnecker [?] [1:48:12] or something, but that's Peggy's cousin. He's a builder too, but that's not who it was.

AW:

Yeah, I think I would remember that one.

BR:

It was—it's like a—it's kind of a long name for a Lumberyard.

AW:

Yeah. Well let's get back to Elko a little bit. What are some of the things that just—you know, we don't have enough batteries in my bag for you to relate all the stories about Elko, but what are some of the things that really stand out in your thinking? If you were to tell the story about you and Buck at Elko.

BR:

Oh. I was going to tell you about when we got home after that first trip to Elko. The phone rang just about the time we walked in the door and it was Buck's sister. I think I've already told you this, but it was Buck's sister and she was—and I answered the phone and she started asking me about Elko and I said, "Sylvia." I said, "I can tell you about it, but I am so tired. I have not had any sleep in about the last twelve hours." You know, because we'd been on those red-eye flights and buses and everything and then stayed up all night. We just never even went to bed. Buck said, "Bette, you haven't had any sleep in about the last twenty-four hours." And I said, "Sylvia, I haven't had any sleep in about the last twenty-four. I can't talk right now." And so anyway, that was—I do remember walking in and just thinking—and that was my philosophy pretty much

from then on. Don't even consider time in Elko. Period. You just don't worry about it. Just go do what you want to do and have to do and feel like doing. I've been that way every year until this year. Literally. Because the first time that I went to Elko with any of the Trig's. You know, Sally Trig goes to bed like when the sun—practically when the sun goes down at the ranch. Those Trig's like their sleep. And here I am out at the folk life center, or wherever, closing down and dancing until two or three in the morning. I'm a whole lot older than Sally and she can't believe it. So anyway, I'm glad they had those and this year, I was really glad that they had those bus things that stayed later. You know, years ago, they stopped them at twelve. And well no, they stopped them even before then, I think. Because now, and I don't—they may have stopped them this year at twelve, but because I'd been sick so much all of January, I was good about getting up. Instead of making Amanda leave—I did make her leave. I had her take me home the first night. But then I figured out I could take those buses back to the—or those transportation SUV's back to the hotel. But the thing about Elko, what I really have always loved about Elko is that it's like going to a wonderful place where you can fill your heart and soul with the things that matter and that's what it's given me. That's what those gatherings have given me. I have always felt—you know, to me, life has enough obstacles and enough meanness and serious things that happen to everyone that you don't need all that negative energy that is out there. You don't need to just be swirled in that all the time because you get swirled in it enough just with whatever obstacles come to you and your family and your family members and your friends and the people you love. So you have to go and you have to find things to fill your cup and that's what I do. I go and fill my cup. That's what I've said about Elko. That's what I've said about Nara Visa. I went to Nara Visa after the towers. The twin towers.

AW:  
Did you?

BR:  
Yes. And I was so devastated. You know, that was so horrible. Amanda was in Utah or someplace where she didn't even know about them until I called to see how she was and told her because she was isolated from things, but I didn't know how it was going to be when I went to Nara Visa. But that was good for me because yes, I was able to get my cup filled. So I look at the arts. Music, poetry, any of the arts. Dancing, singing. You name it. To fill my cup. And I think that's what people need to do for themselves and I think when you want to destroy—I have said this over and over. When you want to destroy a culture, when you want to destroy people, you take away all of those things and that takes the heart and soul out of people and that's what's so frightening to me now. It's, you know, when the heart and soul—because so much of what is happening, the heart and soul is not in it. Not at all.

AW:

Yeah. But you know, I was scared to death when I had to do the keynote the year after the election or month after the election, but what was reassuring was to get there and find out you could still do that.

BR:

Exactly.

AW:

You know, it was.

BR:

Yeah, and I think—I finally just had to say, “I have to do—I have to have a life here. I have to do what I think is important.” And so I thought—because I was so devastated. I decided and this is my new thing. Do what the Dalai Lama says. You know, because I listened to this documentary and he had these ten things that he felt like, but the essence of what the Dalai Lama says is sing, dance, make people happy. That’s what my new philosophy is. Sing, dance, make people happy and you’ll make the world a better place.

AW:

Yeah, exactly.

BR:

And I don’t know if that’s what Buck—you know, in those days, I think that that is where he found some peace and happiness, through his creativity because he was so creative and I have to tell you, I had a very—I probably had a two hour conversation with Eddy Reeves. It’s probably been a couple of months ago now, but I finally—

AW:

Oh, recently?

BR:

Yeah. Talked with him. And one of the things that he told me that he’d never told me, which didn’t surprise me and I told Eddy that. He said—we were talking about him coming in to see Buck in the hospital and throwing that guitar on the bed, saying “Now you’re going to have to learn to play the guitar. You can’t play the piano anymore.” Well he said, “You know.” He said, “Bette.” He said, “I remember talking to Buck after he got hurt and visiting.” He said, “We used to drive around. I used to go in and pick him up and we’d drive around. I was supposed to be going around and checking on real estate and how different building projects and things like that.” He said, “I’d go by and pick Buck up and take him with me.” He said, “I’d come back to

Amarillo to work for my dad for a while.” He was in between doing different things. I don’t know. His dad may have been sick at the time too. I’m not sure. And so he said, “It was right after Buck had gotten hurt and was recuperating.” He said, “We were talking about the changes. Life changes that Buck was going to be having and facing and all that.” He said, “Buck told me, you know, he didn’t know if he wanted to go through those are not. He didn’t know if he still wanted to be here.” I said, “Yeah. That doesn’t surprise me because right after Buck got hurt, he spent a lot of time trying to run me off.”

AW:

Yeah. We talked about that earlier.

BR:

He did. Yeah.

AW:

What do you think changed?

BR:

I think getting into doing the creative stuff is what.

AW:

Writing?

BR:

I think the writing and the music because he got—he started playing the guitar. He started singing. He started doing things. He was just doing it around the house and he was doing it with friends. Irv and John Blackburn and you know, they—people—music brings people together. So does art. Any kind of arts bring people together. Some people that might not come together at all, but through that medium. And Joe Fristo was coming around. There were just people and him just getting more out of himself, but into other things and I think that’s probably it. And probably Amanda being a little, happy baby girl that he could love and spend time with.

AW:

And you have an obligation too.

BR:

And yes. And being—you know, just watching her grow and being—you know, getting to be a father and just—little kids are always going to be an inspiration and so all of those things. And just learning that he could use his mind more than his body.

AW:

Yeah. I think we've talked about this before, but Buck told me many times. He said the accident gave him a "life of the mind." That's his phrase. That's exactly how he put it.

BR:

Exactly. And that's it. And luckily, he had a great mind.

AW:

Right.

BR:

You know.

AW:

That he hadn't used completely.

BR:

That he hadn't used enough. Yeah. I mean, he'd been out there, but he'd been too busy dilly bopping around, doing all those physical things and all the other stuff and not feeding the mind as much as it could be fed, and I think he did a lot of that. You know, he read constantly. He was constantly reading. And I think all of those things. When you—well—when you use what—your mind can take you many places. I mean, it can take you—whenever I get into someplace that I'm not comfortable, like the dentist chair or in one of those machines where they put you and you have to stay and you're like in a tin can and you're hearing noises and they're playing loud rock and roll music out in the room with all that drum beat over and over and you're thinking, "I may go crazy if I don't do something." And so you take your mind someplace else. That's what I did in China. That's what I had to do in China.

AW:

Yeah. Before we—that's a good Segway, but before we get into that, let me ask this question. This is going to be a difficult one. It may be impossible because you weren't there before. Did you see? We know that Elko had an impact on Buck. What about the impact Buck had on Elko?

BR:

Oh, wow.

AW:

And maybe, I should say, not just Elko, but the renaissance of cowboy culture and all the people we know and love so much in that group. Could you see the effect that he had on them and the movement?

BR:

I think that Buck elevated the bar because when we first went there—and I loved it when we first went there, but there was a lot of dog roll. Is that what they're called?

AW:

Dog roll would be kind of some of that early stuff.

BR:

Yeah. There was a lot of that and there was a lot of—you know, that's—I—my favorite growing up—you know, in high school and everything was—and even younger, was being around those people that worked on the land. Like my relatives were farmers and I loved—my grandma lived on a farm. My grandpa lived on a farm. My—you know, farmers did cattle stuff too and farming and all that. But they were just—that's where I just loved being and it was—and I guess that's—what am I trying—I'm getting off of what I was trying to tell you. But those old guys were my favorite people in Elko. The Paul Patterson's. Those. They were funny, but they also had some wisdom to tell you and say and that was the poetry that stood out that to me and the Carlos Ashley and those guys and I called myself—I was like the—not—what? Women that follow the—

AW:

The groupies?

BR:

The groupie. I was the groupie for the Old Geezers. That's what I called myself because those were the ones that I loved hearing and listening to and those were the ones that I had met going out to those old ranches and everything. I loved their colloquialisms. The way they talked. The way they thought. The way they treated their animals. The way—you know, I just loved all of that and that was what was great about starting out and being around those people, but a lot of those younger guys, they were talking more—I mean, they didn't get into talking seriously. It was more the light.

AW:

What we call “the fart jokes poems.”

BR:

Yeah, which I never really liked those. I still don't.

AW:

Yeah. Me either.

BR:

And you know, they thought—I don't think they felt like they could put themselves on the spot. I guess when you give to any artwork. When you do a painting, when you write, you're opening—to me, you're opening up yourself for exposure, for criticism, and you better be willing to take it because nobody's perfect and nothing is perfect and you can always learn from being criticized. You don't need to have a big, bad ego over anything. You can just learn. But I don't think those—somewhere along the way, people have lost some of that. You know, being able to open up and be truthful and talk about things that matter and all of that and I think Buck just learned that you know, he didn't try to mask anything. You know? He just—he was just Buck. He talked about—he was honest about his demons. He was honest about his failures and his downfalls and whatever.

AW:

Yeah. I'll pause this while you answer that.

BR:

Okay. [Pause in recording] There was just a lot of—I think people looked at cowboy culture as just not being—just being a form of unique entertainment.

AW:

It was. You know, people talked about it like a joke. Cowboy poetry.

BR:

Exactly. Yeah. Cowboy poetry, like it wasn't anything to take seriously.

AW:

Like intellectual athlete or something. You couldn't—

BR:

It was something that you just went and you got to laugh and be entertained and kick your heels up and have a beer at the bar and do all these.

AW:

And dress up.

BR:

Yeah, and dress up in your big boots.

AW:

Want to be cowboy clothes.

BR:

And wear your cowboy outfits and play like you—you know, when I was growing up, cowboys were the heroes and they were my heroes. I loved all those guys that wore the white hats. They always won. I mean, all of the movies. You know, they always—

AW:

And didn't get the hat dirty.

BR:

And they didn't get their hat dirty. They always won and they were the heroes and they did good things and they treated women right and they weren't the bad guys and so that's what we grew up with, and so I loved cowboys and when I started running around with Melinda, that's what she gave me was like the real cowboy world because I loved Partner, the old guy that worked on the ranch in Dumas. And I loved Gerald, the guy that worked on the one over in Clarendon, but Partner was one of those old guys that just—you know, he knew all of—I think I've talked about him. He knew the cattle. He knew all their markings. He, you know, could point any one of them out. Knew exactly how many there were. The mama cows. I loved the mama cow man. And then that's also the Trig's. All of that. I'd grown up loving farming. You know, being out in the country with the farmers, but then it was even more with the ranches and the cattle and all that. So but the younger ones. The first thing I realized when we got to Elko is those people did not know how to dance. You know? I thought, we grew up in grade school learning how to put your little foot, and how to schottische, and how to waltz, and how to polka. I thought, that was taught in gym classes and I thought, What? You know, why do these people? They don't even know how to dance? What? And they were trying to have dances and I remember talking to them and saying, "You guys need to be teaching some dancing classes up here." And then Craig, you know, I remember helping Craig with the dance. I started—

AW:

Craig?

BR:

Craig, the guy that does the dancing classes in Elko. The folklorist.

AW:

Oh. Right, right.

BR:

Yeah. His name is Craig. Isn't it?

AW:

No. I don't think so.

BR:

Am I wrong? What is his name?

AW:

Yeah. Well you know—

BR:

Well I'm sorry if I got his name wrong. I can see him.

AW:

My friend Lanny had—they did dance classes. You know, The Ranch Dance Spittle Band. They would start off with a dance class.

BR:

Yeah, yeah. Well you had—because—and still, Andy, those cowboys that come here to the rodeo, they might have all the moves, but they are not dancing to the music and it drives me crazy. They don't have a clue about listening.

AW:

You know, you weren't there with us, but Buck and I played the Broken Spoke in Austin and they make a big deal out of it being a dance hall. We were standing up on the stage and we opened for Don Walter, which was really fun.

BR:

Oh, yeah. Yeah.

AW:

But we watched those people out there dancing and there wasn't a couple out there that was connected to the music.

BR:

I know. I'm just thinking.

AW:

We were shocked.

BR:

Yeah. Now, if you want to get a good dancing partner, you can go out there to that place that Buck and I used to go out on the road where they had that cowboy—

AW:

Old Cowboys.

BR:

Old Cowboys' Association. Those guys will wear your legs out. You know, those old eighty year old guys because when they play a dance song, it'll last ten or fifteen—it seemed like it lasted about ten minutes.

AW:

You know, we had—because I played in dance bands in the eighties in Lubbock and we had lots of great dancers down there. They were all—they weren't—they dressed up like cowboys, but they weren't cowboys. Most of them were farmers.

BR:

Exactly, yeah.

AW:

But they'd grown up dancing.

BR:

Yeah, dancing. Well they used to have dances all over. All the community dances. When Buck and I were courting, they had—he was up working with Malcolm.

AW:

Oh, they were regulars.

BR:

And they'd have those little Amistad. They'd have the little community dances.

AW:

Yeah. Little German Catholic community out northwest of Lubbock. Our band would play there and the contract said that you had to play—[thumping] that was something blowing around out in your side yard there. I just saw it.

BR:

Oh, okay.

AW:

You had to play. Every set, you had to play Cotton-Eyed Joe or schottische and you had to play the Bunny Hop twice a night. [Laughter] It was written in the contract because they were going to dance, you know?

BR:

Yeah. Well, and that's the way it used to be and that's part of the problem too is people don't dance together.

AW:

There are no dance halls.

BR:

Yeah, and you used to have all those kind of things and you used to—well anyway, so those, there are some things like that and of course, that. But I loved having all the different cowboys from all over and then all the different wear and dress and the different ways that they do cattle and the way they—that would come out in the poetry. You know, working with cattle and all of that kind of stuff, but then when I really—somewhere along the way, Buck was talking. It was when we were in North Dakota. He was talking to some fellow. He was being interviewed and they got to talking about the people that worked with cattle and horses all over the world and Buck was saying, "Wouldn't that be great to have people like that all get together and start talking about different things?"

AW:

So he was already thinking about Elko before he got there?

BR:

Well no. That's after he had been to Elko.

AW:

Oh, after he'd been to Elko?

BR:

After he'd been to Elko and he was being interviewed. This is when he'd been to—we'd been to that big folk festival in New York.

AW:

Oh, in New York?

BR:

Well, not New York, but Wash—

AW:

Vancouver?

BR:

Boston.

AW:

Boston.

BR:

Yeah. And you know, anyway, it was—we were driving back and that was that summer that I felt like I aged to two-hundred because we'd been driving everywhere and ninety miles an hour in this. Lanny was with us too and that's when we—that wasn't Vancouver. That was when he was doing that folk festival in east and did—oh no. We did stuff in Colorado and we did this and we did that, but it was like driving, driving, driving, driving. Like, where you couldn't even recognize the wine fields in New York. I remember going past and couldn't see. So, but he was talking to that guy and I love that part of Elko, where they bring all those different people in and have them present.

AW:

You know, there's still controversy about that. People are really angry over The Bask.

BR:

Why?

AW:

I have no idea. You know, because one of the things that Buck and I talked about all the time was how great it was to have the cattle and horse people from Wales.

BR:

From everywhere because those are the people that can contrast and compare and make differences.

AW:

And you can find out that you're more alike than you are different.

BR:

Exactly. Exactly. That's what it's all about. It's about the world and that's what Buck could see and that's been one of my favorite things is to go and meet those guys from Mongolia or meet those guys from Australia or you know. I think that's wonderful for them too and I loved The Bask people. I thought, oh my gosh. I've been coming to Elko all these years and I've been going to eat at those restaurants, but I had no idea about those poetries, those people, and the things that they do. I was just overwhelmed. You know, that was amazing to me and that's what's always amazing to me. When they had those guys from Argentina, oh my gosh. You know, and the music. I've never heard music played like that guy played the clarinet and the saxophone and all those different—I thought, Oh my gosh. Somebody's been—some jazz guy has been around those guys because it was electrifying. And to me, that's—I just feel like I've been so lucky to be able to see that and just, you know, going to one or two folk festivals. International folk festivals where you've gotten to see all those amazing artists from all over the world. That's an experience I'd like everybody to be able to see and Elko gives them part of that experience and those people can get to go to some of the different venues in this country and it's wonderful. When I was sitting up at that one in the east and all the—I had a quilt because Amanda had taught me you need to have something to sit on, you know. I had some kind of quilt or something that I was sitting on and I was sitting out there and that grass had been walked on so much it wasn't even like grass. It was just like dead blades on the ground. It was supposed to be a park, but it's just been completely walked down. But I had that quilt and I had all the—I was the only one sitting on that quilt and I had all these little black kids and brown kids and white kids and they came. They didn't have a quilt to sit on so they came and sat down by me. I was just surrounded with all these beautiful little children on this quilt and I thought—and then we had all these amazing people that we got to watch that were just—the dancers and the horn players and every kind of artist in the world out there doing things and I thought, wouldn't it be wonderful if every child had an experience like this? What would it do for the world if every child could have this same experience? Because I was really into children. That's when I was teaching and working with children and was thinking a lot of them and I still think that. You know, it's like we need that. Every country needs that.

AW:

Do you equate in your mind, all the different gatherings with Elko to just difference in degree or size? Is it all the same cut of the same cloth? Or is there a qualitative difference between Elko and the others?

BR:

Well Elko certainly is the mother of all of these other smaller gatherings. Every Elko that I've been to has been different and has given a different experience. It's always been a good experience, but they've all been different and I've gotten something from every one I've ever been to, but it's that same—I mean, Nara Visa has been different. The thing, the quality. I mean,

I hope—there's always the want-to-be people and there's always the people that think they're going to get fame and fortune through doing their experience and there's the—

AW:

There are the excluders versus the includes. Elko is inclusive and a lot of the others are exclusive.

BR:

Yes, yes. It's like—I think Elko has to set the standard and the pattern to try to follow because they do try to do it. Try to get the truth and the true out there without the political, without the discrimination, without the prejudices. I mean, there's some of that that's going to come in because we all have prejudice. We all have preferences.

AW:

We can't always draw the line between belief and vote.

BR:

We can't. No. There's going to be that because we're human beings and we're all guilty of our own lack of whatever. But they try their very best and they try to do as much variety and try to meet. You know, like the dancing and the music and the poetry and the art and the—I mean, they've tried to open it to every possibility. And the learning, you know, of how to take care of your land and your critters and your—all of those things have been compiled into that experience and then people can go out from there and try to share with others in all these other places. Some, like the one in New Mexico always focused on the music, pretty much. Do they still have that one?

AW:

Ruidoso?

BR:

The Ruidoso one.

AW:

Actually, it was not even—it was swing music.

BR:

Yeah. It wasn't really—

AW:

Really cowboy at all.

BR:

Cowboy music. It was more of the swing.

AW:

Ray Reed.

BR:

Ray Reed. It was more of the swing.

AW:

That's who we couldn't about.

BR:

It was more of the Ray Reed swing dancing and music, but they did allow the vendors, the guitar people, the different.

AW:

And they stuck, we, songwriters and poets off in little crannies. I remember that.

BR:

Off in a little place. Every now and then, you could have the stage for something, but it was more of the music and stuff. So everyone, and then Red does a lot of music and swing stuff with his, but he does have some poets and he has tried to incorporate. See, my thought was and I think it was right is after Buck died, and of course, I noticed it even before Buck died, I thought, you guys need to start generating some young—you know, things to attract the younger people.

AW:

Well we tried. We were trying. It wasn't that easy.

BR:

Yeah. So.

AW:

Well that moves us nicely over to talk a little bit about Nara Visa because you were there at the beginning. Can you talk about that a little bit? About why it came about?

BR:

Nara Visa?

AW:

Um-hm.

BR:

Well I was there because Buck and Phil got together. Phil Martin. They were talking about, you know, trying to do something in this area since we are primarily surrounded by ranches and since we are where a lot of the Vaqueros taught the cowboys all the roping and riding and different things and we have been associated with the cowboy world for our whole history, Texas. And so they were trying to figure out a place where there were now plowed fields and they had grass and it was cattle country and I don't know if it was Buck or Phil or whoever. They knew about Nara Visa and they thought that would be a great place because it was just that little community. At the time, it had, I think a motel and—

AW:

Two motels.

BR:

It had two motels.

AW:

And then one down the road in Logan.

BR:

Yeah, and then Post. I don't know. They may have even had a bar, but I don't think they did.

AW:

No, Logan. The nearest bar was in Logan.

BR:

Yeah. So they just thought that would be a great place and I think they talked—I think the folklorist was also a musician.

AW:

Yeah. For New Mexico?

BR:

Uh-huh.

AW:

Yeah. Had the limp.

BR:

Yeah, and I think—

AW:

I'll look up his name.

BR:

I don't know if he offered to do anything grant wise.

AW:

Yes, he did. I think that was—

BR:

For the first one, and I think that may have been an impetuous for them to get it started. Then they had those ranching people from Dalhart and Channing and all around that were willing, and Logan and different places. So I think that's how it really got started and then Buck had been to Elko and met different poets and right at first, they had people coming from Montana and all over. You know, Colorado and Oklahoma.

AW:

I do remember that the pay was allocated based on how far you had to drive.

BR:

Yeah. You—and they gave everybody a chance to perform and then they—somebody got together and decided who got to perform on the Saturday night stage.

AW:

Yeah, I never was quite sure how we decided it, but we—

BR:

I don't know how they decided, but I think it was a committee or somebody. They all got together and picked out the best of the ones that had performed in the afternoon and in the Friday night and they just tried to keep it clean. Tried to keep it where everybody got a chance, but some people were better than the others and got to do a second go. I don't, you know. And they

took turns. Everybody got their turn.

AW:

Well you know, the first few years, we had two shows and everybody played. They played on one show or the other. If you showed up, you played. That's Buck's famous letter, "No stars need apply." We had some people get mad and leave and never came back because they didn't get to be a star and so I remember that and I also remember that people that were just mediocre, when they got to Nara Visa, became brilliant. Those first few years, it was quite a transformation.

BR:

It's been wonderful, to me, to watch the growth.

AW:

Oh, you mean—is it still? Because the last couple of times I went, it wasn't quite the same, as I recall.

BR:

Well I'm talking about the growth of the person.

AW:

The people, got it.

BR:

The people. The little kids, you know, some of them that started out and were just little kids and then grew up to be really good.

AW:

Rooster.

BR:

Rooster. And Dale.

AW:

The Dentist. Remember the Dentist? Dale Burson.

BR:

Dale Burson and his kids. Just watching and seeing them get better and better. For me, it was good to watch Buck grow in his music and art. His music and poetry and everything. Andy Hedges. You. I've gotten to see every—that's what's been great and I'm going to say, the

cowboy poetry is better. People are writing better. They are reaching higher standards and exploring more and being—you know, watching Paul Zarzyski [Phone rings] grow and watch—well just seeing people, that's been wonderful through the years. [Pause in recording] When you ask me about the impact that Elko has had and I think technology, the internet, has helped stream this through worldwide, actually. The impact that Elko has had. Number one, all the little gatherings and middle sized gatherings that you've seen. I don't know how many there are, but there are lots of them across the United States. Not just in the west, but even back east and then you have not only with—you have the cowboys going to folk festivals because cowboys considered folk music, which there were folk festivals before, but now they've expanded into different genres as well. And the story telling festivals and then you have the poetry slams. All of these things, some of this stuff was happening back in New York when they used to have those—I've forgotten what they call them now, but those things on the river where they'd have all these people come, kind of for gatherings and have all these—

AW:

Like a hootenanny?

BR:

Well it wasn't a hoot nanny. It's what Phil took to Elko one year. I've forgotten what he called it, but it was like on the banks. It was out. It was in New York. It had a neat name and I can't think of it.

AW:

The Chautauqua.

BR:

Chautauqua.

AW:

Yeah. It was actually on Lake Chautauqua. The Methodists started that in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

BR:

Okay. Having the Chautauqua's. You know, you've always had people gathering for knowledge, for—

AW:

Yeah, and the hallmark of the Chautauqua was it was a combination of entertainment and education.

BR:

Uh-huh. Yeah, and so that's—we've always had people wanting to gather for things like that so that's the initial thing, but now, with the internet and with the worldwide thing, you can get online. There's all kinds of poetry, ways of learning. They have little canned things that you can learn about poetry this way or that way. The girl scouts now have a poetry badge. I don't remember that when I was in girl scouts. They have haiku for the cherry blossoms. You know, it has inspired poetry in people. I believe that art belongs to the people. I don't. I'm kind of like Stanley. I don't think it has to be clustered in a museum. I think dance started with the people. I think poetry started with the people. Painting, all these things started with the people and it belongs to the people and Elko has helped get poetry out of the Ivory Tower to the people.

AW:

Yeah. Dana Gioia's book, "Can Poetry Matter?" was picked up right away by one of his associates in the northwest who did, "Can Cowboy Poetry Matter?" You know, that Buck and I were both in the anthology. But Gioia's idea being that the G.I. bill in colleges offering writing programs was what killed public interest in poetry because you know, up to that point, Dylan Thomas, for instance, after the second World War came to America and he was a rock star doing poetry, reading. In a few short years, poets were only reading to one another and so here's this new movement. Cowboy poetry and logger poetry. Those were the two that first surfaced. No pun intended for the logger poetry, but it was poetry by and for people and not academics.

BR:

And there's fisherman people and there's—

AW:

Yeah. Fisher poets.

BR:

I mean, fisherman poetry. There's all kinds of poetry. When I was in high school, when the poets in New York were doing all their stuff, remember those red onions and blue onions and purple onion places?

AW:

Oh, we had a purple onion in Lubbock.

BR:

Exactly. Where you went and sat on the floor and listened to poetry.

AW:

Beanbag chairs and they had black lights.

BR:

And you had coffee.

AW:

Coffee.

BR:

And you listened to poetry.

AW:

And wore your turtleneck.

BR:

Exactly. Well you know, because I've always loved poetry. Children loved poetry. For crying out loud, you know.

AW:

They make it up.

BR:

They make it up and they love it and they've always done—so it's like they've helped by saying, "It's okay." These rough, tough, crusty old guys that want you to believe that they are rough, tough, crusty old guys, some even curmudgeons can do poetry.

AW:

Yes, and in fact, the curmudgeons are the most sentimental of the whole lot.

BR:

Exactly. And I'm telling you, they are marshmallows because I can see through them and I know and so they are rough. They can be rough and crusty, don't get me wrong, and tough, but when you watch somebody—the way they handle their horse or the way they birth a calf, hey, you know, you see the tenderness and the feeling and know, and that's what it's all about. And what I've seen as I've gotten older and been to the poetry gathering, I've seen that coming out more. You know, it's the feeling and the tenderness and the willingness to expose yourself and allow people to know and some of those guys and maybe it is just getting older and being mellow and not having to wear your mask.

AW:

Well you have to—not only does every person has to learn, but every movement has to learn. It's like ranching today, learning a lot more about managing grass than it knew a hundred years ago.

Certainly, a hundred and fifty years ago. Well let me ask this. This is more of a housekeeping thing. We could talk a little bit more about this subject. We could also talk about China, but I have an idea that China's going to be a big topic. Am I wrong?

BR:

No, you're not wrong.

AW:

Okay. Let's save China for the next time and let's talk a little bit more about—because at some point, we're going to have to—if I'm not wearing you out, you're wearing me out. So no, I mean, this is an intense process, these interviews. There's so much to think about. It keeps the brain going along. One thing that I think would be worth talking about a little this afternoon and then we'll tackle China. Maybe the current events will make it even more cogent next time we get together, but one thing that if you don't mind and you're free to say, "This is too much," or "I don't want to do this." Is it worthwhile or even possible to speculate about the things that were next up for Buck in the way of his work?

BR:

Well the things that were next up for Buck was he was going to be—he'd already started expanding himself in different directions. He'd already started bringing a little bit of jazz to the cowboy gathering. "Miss Otis Regrets." Bringing in some of this into not just Elko, but you know, singing "September Song" and a few things at some gatherings. Kind of expanding the cowboy way. The cowboy world to opening themselves up a little bit further and a little bit further. And then the notes for the novel poetry, that was later whenever he allowed himself to be very exposed.

AW:

That's my very favorite Buck poem.

BR:

I know it is. But that was him.

AW:

You know, I had this—and this is embarrassing to say, as it's my favorite. I had this idea that he wrote that early on.

BR:

No, it took him a long time to get to that.

AW:

Yeah. That makes more sense.

BR:

It took him a long time to get to that and it took him—it took a lot of him just—I'm just going to say buckling up.

*[End of Recording]*



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