

**Oral History Interview of
Bette Ramsey**

**Interviewed by: Andy Wilkinson
March 7, 2016
Amarillo, Texas**

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Transcription Notes:

Interviewer: Andy Wilkinson

Audio Editor: Elissa Stroman

Transcription: Elizabeth Groening

Editor(s): Kayci Rush

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Bette Ramsey as she discusses her high school years and befriending the love of her life, Buck Ramsey. Bette describes seeing Buck in high school, their friendship, and her friendship with Melinda.

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Bette Ramsey (BR):

It's nice that they're doing it on the phone instead of having to go down there and sit in line or stand in line and wait for hours.

Andy Wilkinson (AW):

Yeah you have to take a number and all that sort of thing. When they call back—I misunderstood when I was there at the social security office before the first of the year they said, "Well we'll make an appointment by phone and you can come in and take care of it." So I assumed they would call back and make us an appointment to go in. When I got this call this morning I was expecting them to say okay your appointment will be you know, April something. They said oh no we're going to take care of this over the phone. I said, "Well I'm in Amarillo and my wife's in Lubbock." She seemed like, "Do you have a number for her?", "Yes I do.", "Okay." So anyhow we'll do that, but that's my long apology for when the phone rings I'll have to take it. This is the seventh of March, 2016. Andy Wilkinson here with my dear friend and hero—heroine I guess if we're being of our generation, Bette Ramsey. We're talking up from the interview that we started—what day was that, that was in October.

BR:

A long time ago.

AW:

Yeah October the twentieth. I have a note here to start today with high school.

BR:

Boy.

AW:

So there we go. Now you were living in Amarillo, right? When you started high school.

BR:

I was living in Amarillo and at the time that was—I graduated in '57 so that would've been about 1954. Amarillo high was the only high school. We only had—well we had—I think about four junior highs that fed into the high school.

AW:

Did you do all of your junior high here also or was that some—

BR:

Uh-hum.

AW:

Okay so what junior high did you go to?

BR:

I went to Margaret Wills.

AW:

Margaret Wills?

BR:

No, no that was my elementary I'm sorry. Sam Houston.

AW:

Sam Houston.

BR:

I went to Margaret Wills elementary, Sam Houston high school and I went—well I started—we moved in from River Road when I was still in elementary school. I loved living in River Road but we moved in the summer before school started. We had just lived in a rent house, and daddy had to find another [Interviewer picks up recorder] place to live because the house we were living in sold, and so we had to move out pretty quick. He rented this house that everybody hated. I liked it because it had a little old shack out in the back yard that I could make a play house out of, so it was fine with me. It was on 6th street and 6th street—it was busy but not like it is now because it was Route 66 but not nearly as busy as it is now. Well it's pretty busy because it was Route 66.

AW:

Yeah, I was going to say you're right on the highway.

BR:

Yeah and my dad, he would get—his ears would clog up with wax and he wouldn't realize it but he got to where he couldn't hear and then he'd go have his ears cleaned. We got to where we'd talk and say things around him knowing that he couldn't hear but then he got his ears cleaned and could hear. He wouldn't tell us for a little while you know, we got in trouble a few times over that. Anyway, everybody else just hated that house because you could hear the cars at night and it was just a crappy house. He finally found a more appropriate house about four blocks away. I started going to school at San Jacinto, which that was a rough school back then because there was a lot of poor people that lived there, including us that lived in that neighborhood. But then daddy found a three bedroom house with a back porch and living room, dining room, nice kitchen, and all that kind of stuff that was a lot better for us. So we moved in that and I was still

in San Jacinto but I lost about fifteen pounds, and I was a skinny little thing, but I lost about fifteen pounds at San Jacinto because I was so unhappy. My mother talked to the school at Margaret Wills and wanted me to go there. We were right on the dividing line we lived across the street from where it started Margaret Wills. All my friends were going to Margaret Wells, the kids I went to church with and everything because the church was only a block away—a couple of blocks away from where we lived at the time. So I went to Margaret Wills and at that time we had a slide as a fire escape. They won't let them do that anymore, but we loved having fire drills because we got to go down the slide.

AW:

Yeah I remember my cousin Ben Ingham, one of the Ingham boys of AY and sons, Jerry and Jeff and all of them. Well Ben was superintendent at Texoma and they had that slide. It was three stories tall, it was better than you could get at an amusement park.

BR:

Yeah, oh yeah, it was lots of fun. They outlawed those. I went to school there, and I loved Margaret Wills and had a group of friends and girl scouts and all that. Then we went to high school. In high school, we actually lived over there on Laurel Street, which was a block away from Georgia. My dad was a contractor, I've told you about him being in the paint business and his partner running out on him, so he had all this paint so he just started contracting, and he was real good at it, because he's real good with numbers and configured jobs, and was honest so he had a good business.

AW:

Two things that would set you apart in that business.

BR:

Exactly. So he had several builders that really liked him and that he worked for all the time. One of the builders was building houses over there and offered to let him do some work for him to pay the down payment on the house. Mother always wanted a rock, wood, glass house, and that one had pretty rock and so we moved into that new house. Then I started high school. Stephen F Austin, Margaret Wills, Nixon and Horseman the four—

AW:

Horseman.

BR:

The four junior highs that fed into Amarillo High. In my sophomore year it was the only high school but in the middle of my junior year they had finished Palo Duro High. We had—Amarillo high because it was the only high school that had really good sports teams, and they had won

several state football things, tournaments and everything and had a lot of trophies. They had won basketball before, but they had a really, really good basketball team that was set up to win state. Well, when they built Palo Duro, all the really good basketball players went to Palo Duro and they won state that year.

AW:

Their first year?

BR:

Yeah, and all the coaches were really mad. Well, they had some great basketball players that lived over there. Buck went to two years of high school—no maybe three years of high school except for the middle year—no maybe two. Well anyway, he knew all those east side guys because not only did they grow up together at Nixon because Buck went to Nixon junior high, and they all went to the Maverick Club too. They grew up playing together and knowing each other, so he knew all those guys. I knew some of them because I was a junior, and it was the middle of the year when they left. Amarillo high was really big, it had about twenty-five hundred students at that time. They were just to the max and even had some outbuildings, different places. They may have even used some of the churches around for some of the kids. Anyway, the school got smaller. We still had a great high school, they had really good choir directors and they had a wonderful journalism guy, and the journalism guy was extremely talented and really smart. He even got into helping with the musicals because he could sing really pretty, and he always sang those hard songs like “Ave Maria” you know at Christmas time. He could sing that song, that religious song that everybody—I’ll think of it in a minute, he’d sometimes do solos for us when we’d have programs. He loved Buck because Buck was really talented, and could sing. The choir director and the journalism guy—Buck was interested in both of those things. I told you that nobody knew Buck could sing in his family until he got in junior high school. The choir director in junior high discovered he had perfect pitch, and he could sing parts, you know all the different parts, and put him in a quartet and that’s when he started going around to all those clubs and businesses. They would let the high school students do that at the time. By the time he got in high school, he was singing jazz with the Sandie Swingsters which was a really good little independent band.

AW:

The Sandie Swingsters?

BR:

The Sandie Swingsters.

AW:

What a great name.

BR:

They would go around and play in the night clubs. Even though Buck was too young, he would be their singer and he'd go sing at these local night clubs around town. He sang at high school proms, and anywhere the Sandie Swingsters played, Buck would go and be the main singer. He was singing all those old forties Frank Sinatra—he sounded like a young Frank Sinatra, he had that beautiful high tenor voice. Of course, all the girls including me, just thought he was the cutest, most wonderful thing. I think I've told you this story about how I even recognized him when they did that choir program.

AW:

No.

BR:

Didn't I already tell you this?

AW:

No, I don't think so.

BR:

Well I was a sophomore and they always had the sophomores come in separate because the school was too big to have—you know we had a bigger sophomore class than any other class. They would have us come in and do those special programs for—and so the junior choir was the Aeolian choir and Buck was in the Aeolian choir and he had perfect pitch, so Fryhover the choir director used him as the tuning fork.

AW:

Say that name again.

BR:

Fryhover.

AW:

F-r-e-i maybe. [phone vibrates 00:13:33]

BR:

I think it was just F-r-y-h-o-v-e-r.

AW:

Hang on just a second. I'm sorry let me put this on hold. Hello.

[Pause in recording]

AW:

All right sorry. Now my future is assured. Such as it can be assured. So we were talking about Buck's—

BR:

Fryhover. Anyway they were doing this choir concert for us at the sophomore assembly, and I'm sitting in the audience. Fryhover pointed to Buck and had him hum the—

AW:

He hummed the note?

BR:

The note.

AW:

So Buck really did have perfect pitch?

BR:

He did, yeah.

AW:

You know all the years we traveled together he would never own up to that.

BR:

Yeah but he did.

AW:

Really?

BR:

Yeah he would hum the note, and then they would start singing. So about half way through the concert, Fryhover would point to him, he'd hum the note and the choir started singing. They sang about the first line or two of the song and then Fryhover just stopped them. Then of course everybody in the audience was thinking, Well why'd they stop? Curious, and all that, looking around, and then Fryhover said something to the choir—you know he's backwards to us, but he said something to the choir and the people in the choir started laughing. Fryhover moved over a little bit and you saw this cute little guy with this big pretty smile, and his face was beat red right in the middle of the choir, you know he was standing in the middle. I thought, well now isn't he

just the cutest thing. Of course he was embarrassed but he hummed the key again, evidentially he had hummed the wrong key.

AW:

Oh he had hummed the wrong key?

BR:

He had hummed the wrong key.

AW:

He had been on the key but not the right one.

BR:

Yeah and so then he hummed the right one and they stared all over again. But I would see Buck in the hallway that day. I still remember what he had on. He had on a black corduroy shirt, and I thought he is so cute. I just got this big crush on him you know because he was this cute, I don't know I like to see men that get embarrassed. There's something—

AW:

I was going to say you know the other thing was all these years I've traveled with Buck I don't think I ever saw him embarrassed.

BR:

I know, but see he was just really shy. I love seeing a man—because you don't hardly see it very much. It's just kind of endearing to me to see somebody actually turn red and get embarrassed about something. Anyway, I just got this big crush on him, so then I would—he was always walking some pretty girl to her class. It wasn't me, it was some—the most beautiful girls. Everybody liked Buck, he had won sophomore favorite, and he ran and he was runner up for junior favorite in high school. A lot of his friends say that they ask around about what class—because they voted by classrooms, and what classroom did what. A lot of times administrators would not let the person that actually won by the student vote, but they would make sure it was a student that they liked. Yes, they cheated on those elections. Well, and the journalism guy was the one that—he was usually in charge. But because Buck had won the first year they probably didn't want him to win two years in a row. But anyway, he was very well thought of. At that time, the journalism teacher still like Buck and he won like the state president of the high school journalism association or whatever. But they went to the convention—now the journalism teacher, unbeknownst to me at the time—because I didn't know anything. He was notorious for coming on to the boys in—yeah. Buck didn't know it, you know Buck had no idea. Buck was a junior when this happened, but the journalism guy took trips, and he was notorious for booking a room with only one bed and having to sleep with whoever he was rooming with. That happened

with Buck, and in the middle of the night he reached over and touched his leg or something and you know that was—Buck was just—and then after that, his teacher hated him and didn't want him—he somehow wouldn't let him be the state president of the journalism—got that nullified and did all kinds—because Buck rejected him. He did all kinds of things—he was angry with Buck. Buck never said anything to anyone, he probably told some of his best friends like Wa [Hua] or somebody.

AW:

Like who?

BR:

Joe Wa [Hua] or Wa [Hua] Joe was—he goes by Stephen now, but we knew him as Wa [Hua].

AW:

Wa like W-a?

BR:

Chinese yeah. Chinese Wa [Hua], yeah. It was the Joe family, and they had a bunch of boys and one girl, and they owned the only Chinese restaurant that was down by the bus station that stayed open 24 hours. He was Buck's best friend, he was best man at our wedding.

AW:

How do you spell Joe?

BR:

J-o-e just j-o-e.

AW:

J-o-e. W-a J-o-e?

BR:

Uh-huh. When I was in elementary school, first—when we lived across the street from the elementary school Wa [Hua] Joe lived around the corner from me. This was when I was in the second grade, because we moved to Amarillo from Dalhart when I was in the second grade. No, I think we moved from Albuquerque when I was in the second grade because I started first grade in Dalhart. Anyway, oh and I looked up—by the way when we were talking last time and I told you my dad worked at the air base during the war and my mom was a gray lady. A gray lady, was somebody that hosted a lot of things and did all the hostessing whatever things at the canteen and stuff. Of course, mother was a great cook and she fed all those people and was probably cooking—

AW:

She's just like you. [Laughs]

BR:

Yeah, it's in the genes.

AW:

Or you're just like her.

BR:

It's in the genes. She was just like my grandmother and my great grandmother all that. Anyway, finally I think when Buck was a senior, this journalism guy had harassed him and gotten him in trouble with the principal so much that Buck finally told his dad. His dad went to the school board, and it took the school board—because this guy was really entrenched, the principal loved him, the superintendent loved him because he was a great guy.

AW:

Surely by then they knew?

BR:

Yeah but it took them—Sylvia was behind me, his little sister, and she was a cheerleader and they had some other cheerleader boys with them. One of the cheerleaders was one of the guys that Fryhover always—when they'd go to all their out of town football games and things like that. Fryhover would go sponsoring, he was like the cheerleader sponsor or something, he and this guy would room together. Of course, it was a joke among the cheerleaders by then, but that's when I was senior, but Buck was already out of school. Buck was already out of school and they finally, I think the year that I was a senior, sometime in the middle of the year, this journalism guy left and he went to some college in Denton or something and taught at a college level. He was really good with journalism and even theater, and all that kind of stuff. He just was real talented but he shouldn't of—and anyway. Buck got an early education about the you know, some of the gay people, and really at first was pretty anti until he got older and got a little more understanding about it.

AW:

Well yeah.

BR:

But people were always coming on to him because he was cute and he was talented in a lot of the same—

AW:

Well and he's always, in my experience, was always a very open person and a lot of people mistake openness of a person as agreement with—

BR:

Exactly yeah. That's why he—a lot of the times hitchhiking it'd be some gay person that would pick him up. He just really got burned a few times. Being able to sing like he did he had been accepted on the Ted Mack amateur hour in New York and didn't ever go because—

AW:

He never quite said to me why he didn't show up. He was talking when I was writing this article about him, and he said something that I thought was really interesting. He said, "I've always lived a life of potential," and I said, "And what do you meant by that?" And he said, "I was always about to be something, and I would then do something so it wouldn't happen."

BR:

He did that over, and over, and over again.

AW:

Did he—I know. I mean even when we would rehearse a song, we'd rehearse it for a week, we get up on stage, and he'd do another song. [Laughs] Did he ever make any sort of explanation to you? He never did to me.

BR:

I don't know. I always wondered a little bit if he had a problem with worthiness or something. I don't know, because I used to say "Buck why do you—" Well, and I would get mad at him when he first started performing because any time that you hear something really beautiful where it goes straight to your heart, you were at a different wavelength. You were riding a wave and you were at the top of the wave, and you just want to stay on that wave as long as you can because it feels so good to be there. And Buck could do that when he would—he would bring this out in people, and I could see it in the audience and feel it. Then he would do something like forget a word or do something stupid you know to—and I would say, "Buck, stop doing that. If you can—"

AW:

He would apologize. He'd stop and make a mistake and—

BR:

He said, "Well that's just part—" and I said, "No it is not. If you cannot get up there on stage and give that audience the very best you can do—you get them up to this and then you do something

to mess it up. That is not part of what is good. Those people pay good money to see you, you give them your best or you don't do it at all. You are doing this because you love it and because it gives you fun. When it quits being fun and you're doing it just because you want to make money, then you need to stop."

AW:

I'm really curious about this because another incident when I was recording that album, Charlie Goodnight, and I asked him to sing a particular song, "an eye on the boss" because it was all about cattle and the things he knew. So I thought, Here's a guy that needs to sing this. He never once said anything about anything, he just did it and did a great job and years later when he was singing another song from that record that I'd sung, he said that's the song that I've always wanted to sing.

BR:

"Goodbye to my Palo Duro."

AW:

Yeah and I would've been just tickled to death to have him sing that song but he never said a word about it. I said, "Well Buck why didn't you say so?", "Well I—you know—" and he'd mumble something about it's your project and I didn't want to butt in, that sort of thing. I thought at the time maybe that was connected to this not showing up for the Ted Mack amateur hour. But so you've known more inside into that than—

BR:

No other than I was wondering if something—because he was always demeaning to himself. He never—

AW:

He didn't want to be better than—thought to be too much better than everybody else. Was that—

BR:

I think that's a lot of it because he was so—I'm going to tell you a story his dad told me. His dad and I really had a good relationship, his dad—because I guess Buck couldn't do things he would come, and we'd work in the yard or he'd do little man projects you know, carpentry because his dad knew how to do a lot of different things. His dad's really the one that taught me how to work because he would work, and then take his time and we'd rest, we wouldn't wear ourselves out. But we would talk a lot about Buck. He said, "You know, when we lived in Middlewell he would just go out in those pastures in the country and he was just a little kid. He'd roam, we wouldn't know where he was for hours. He'd just be out roaming the fields and the pastures and doing all this stuff. We wouldn't have any idea and we'd worry. I whooped that boy until I was

plum ashamed of myself, and it didn't do a bit of good. Didn't do one bit of good. When we moved to town he was so mad at us." They lived out there where there was still a lot of wide open fields at that time. He said, "He'd go roam all those. We never knew where he was, he was always bringing in some stray to stay with us." You know, they had like six—well they had seven kids before Patricia died, Patricia died when she was four. He said another mouth to feed and of course, they were—Mrs. Ramsey was working and he was working.

AW:

Yeah they weren't rich.

BR:

No. Buck did that our whole married life too. He brought in strays. He'd pick up hitchhikers and whatever, and bring them home.

AW:

Well some of us strays are glad that he did.

BR:

Well yeah, I was glad for some of them, but there were some—you know one of them was some guy that threatened to murder me and Amanda in the middle of the night after I had fed him this wonderful dinner. His name was Harry, and he and Stanley had picked him up in somewhere on one of the streets roaming around out in the middle of the night. Probably sometime when they were out drinking or something. He was some kind of gutter guy, that I think he had been released from prison I don't know. He was very intelligent, and they loved talking to him and everything. Stanley had had him out at his house, and they'd talk and Buck brought him home to dinner and was going let him stay all night. This guy said, "Well what would you do if I just got up and murdered your wife and daughter in the middle of the night?" Buck said, "Well you sorry son of a bitch. Threatening my wife and child," and he put him in his car and took him out and let him out, and he didn't bring just any old guy home anymore after that. Which I was thankful for. When we lived in Utah and he had come to Texas and stay for a while, and go to Austin and work on this political campaign or that. He'd come back with a hitchhiker and there was this one guy, and he was a nice kid but he stayed around for two or three days and I finally said, "Buck you kind of need to take this guy back out to the highway." You know we've had him around for three or four days, and I think you probably need to take him back out and let him get on his way.

AW:

This of course we weren't running the recorder last night, but it was a wonderful evening with Bob Rotan and—

BR:

Susan and—

AW:

Susan and Bobby Davis, George Meyer. Talking—all these same stories about Buck and his strays that would come over. Was he like that in high school when you first met him?

BR:

Yeah. But the difference between Buck in high school and Buck later is that in high school he was in everything. He was like in AY and in—he was in all the clubs and everything. I have a picture of him where Jamey Saunders, Marianne's [?] [00:33:26] brother was like Mr. AHS [**Amarillo High School**] and very popular, big guy. Buck always looked up to Jamey and Jamey really liked Buck a lot. Jamey recommended Buck to go to this boys camp and be a camp counselor somewhere up around—what's that place that everybody goes to now in Missouri or—

AW:

Oh Branson?

BR:

Branson. It's close to Branson I can't remember the name of the camp. But I've a picture of Buck that somebody sent me that I never thought about Buck's body being beautiful, you know I never paid any attention, I didn't pay attention to men's bodies. When he got hurt, my brother-in-law, who was a really good artist—he ended up being a wood sculptor, sculpting—

AW:

Which brother in law was this?

BR:

This was my sister Phyllis's husband. His son is an animator, and an artist, and everything too, and his son is also the same. They have that really good artistic ability. But Harold had a natural talent for drawing and art and everything, had drawn bodies and things in art classes in high school. When he walked in and saw Buck laying on that table with just a towel over him that's all he could have because of all the nerves that were just you know, raw. Harold walked out of that room and he said, "My god Buck has a beautiful body. He has a body like one of those Michael Angelo statues." I never really connected with that until I saw some of those Michael Angelo statues of David and I thought, He does have a beautiful body. But that picture when he was in his prime and he was just a natural athlete. All the tennis players and the other guys that were natural athletes talk about what a wonderful—because they went to the maverick club and Buck could do all the trampoline stuff. He could do anything that he chose to do because his body—and Amanda's that way. She could ski, she could do the trampoline, she could do all that

sports stuff. I'm a klutz but they have that natural athletic ability. Of course, he played football in junior high but he was too small in high school so he played baseball, and he loved baseball. All those guys that he ran around with were athletes, he ran around with the football players, the basketball players, and the trampoline, and the tennis guys, he didn't discriminate between who was what. When he was at WT [**West Texas A&M**] he had all those football players, Joe Granado [?] [00:36:45] and all those guys that he loved to take out and find fights. He'd watch them fight. [AW laughs] One of the football players would stand over and bet on who was going to win. Joe would be out there fighting air moon [?] [00:37:04] you know, Joe Granado. Anyway he has a lot of stories that you need to get from him, probably ones I don't want to hear but anyway. That was Buck. In high school he did go to that camp and he loved it but they were just sitting there in their bathing suits I think because they did canoeing, they did all kinds of stuff as camp counselors. There was all these wonderful like, youth organizations, Christian things. I never heard Buck say a curse word, he didn't drink, he didn't smoke, I mean he was just this really good guy. That's the way all of his buddies were in high school, they did some dumb things but they didn't drink, and smoke and do all that kind of stuff. They'd go hunting and kill some ducks that they shouldn't have killed on somebody's property. Something crazy like that but that was him in high school.

AW:

Did the two of you date in high school?

BR:

No, no. I just really had this big crush on him but he was dating all the most beautiful girls in high school.

AW:

I think, Bette, you were probably one of the most beautiful girls in high school too.

BR:

No I never—you know when he started dating Barbara Willbanks who was probably the first, really, love of his life. We would double date sometimes, and I thought there's no way I can—you know girls would try to find something wrong with each other. I don't know if you know that or not. But when we were young, if you could just find a freckle or just maybe their ears weren't shaped exactly, anything just anything. She was just perfect you know, and I thought, There is no way that—she's just gorgeous and I liked her. I always liked all of his girlfriends and it was that way until we got in college. He would come—he was always around. He would come around and he would be there, but we never dated. I'd see him and we'd talk and we were just great friends. I got in junior college and Barbara Willbanks and I got to be really best friends, but by then they had broken up because she was crazy about Billy who was in her class and a big football player. She always liked dark men, I always liked blonds but she liked the dark—dark

eyed, dark haired men and still does. That's why she's married to an Italian guy. Anyway, I think she broke his heart really but they remained friends. When Buck died that year, Barbara Willbanks, and her little sister, and me, and I think Janie [?] [00:40:42] was here at that time—were here for thanksgiving. And I thought, What better ending of the year could he have had than to have his first love, his last love at the same table sharing a thanksgiving meal, enjoying the friendship, and the love and the comradery that we all shared together. I mean I didn't know Buck was dying, but I thought that was a wonderful gift for him to have that.

AW:

Say for the recording who Janie—

BR:

Janie was Joe Fristos [?] [00:41:31] wife. She was a really good friend, and Joe was a really good friend. Jamey was living in Germany, really smart.

AW:

Yeah I remember meeting Joe. Joe was a base player right?

BR:

Joe played the piano and the base. He's the one that when Buck would write a song or music, Joe would write the notes and put it on the music sheet for Buck.

AW:

He'd store the piece.

BR:

Uh-huh yeah.

AW:

Is Joe still alive?

BR:

No. Joe moved down in the Houston area and played with some of the musicians. His daughter—all of his children were very musical like Joe, and his daughter was really smart. Joe was very smart. She got a scholarship in math and music, and had a dual—graduated from that real good school down in Georgetown.

AW:

Rice? Oh in Georgetown, Southwestern?

BR:

Southwestern or Southwest. The same one that Kaitlyn graduated from, and was living in Houston and had a good job, so Joe moved down there with her. There was a really good base player that was wonderful that Joe knew, that had gone to Houston and was playing with a lot of jazz bands. Joe liked to play jazz. Joe could play just about any instrument. He played the flute, he played the—

AW:

Yeah I really enjoyed being around him when he was playing.

BR:

He played the piano, the flute, I think he might've played the clarinet and the saxophone. He was just a natural musician.

AW:

When he moved, I lost touch with him. But as I recall, and correct me if I'm wrong, when I got the chance to know him when he was still here, he was not in all that good health.

BR:

No he wasn't. He had kind of wacked his brain out on—he smoked a lot of dope. Smoked a lot of marijuana. I don't know if he got into any higher level things, I don't think he could afford any of the higher level stuff, but he had that residue brain from too much marijuana. He was overweight all the time and I think he became diabetic and didn't eat right. I don't know, anyway that was Joe.

AW:

Was he still alive when you had this thanksgiving dinner?

BR:

I think he was, but he and Janie had divorced by then because she finally came back to Amarillo because she had a mother that was still alive. Found out that Joe had been living with Alisha and had three or four kids by then. I mean they had never divorced, she was still in Germany and wouldn't leave, but they had been separated for years. I think she finally ended up finalizing the divorce. She really liked Buck because she was very smart, and they could talk literature, poetry and all this stuff. She wanted to be an agent for him, and did get him published in some kind of Middle Eastern magazine that was all in—

AW:

Really?

BR:

Uh-huh that poem that he wrote about the terrorist or something. I don't know if you ever read that one or not but he wrote that poem about the terrorist or something, and it was published in I think in an Iranian—I don't know Egyptian, some magazine.

AW:

Do you happen to have a copy of that?

BR:

I think it's—it might be in some—

AW:

Is it in the archive?

BR:

-- of the stuff that's being archived.

AW:

I'll look to see because I don't remember seeing the publication. I remember the poem but—

BR:

Yeah, and I think John Dofflemyer had it in one of his earlier books. You know, I sent all that stuff, we need to talk to Hal and Teresa, I sent a whole bunch of stuff to them. Like all those things that that lady—those videos and everything that that lady that Maryanne knew that worked for the television. Your person said that he knows how to convert all that stuff.

AW:

Yeah we can do that.

BR:

And I thought that Hal might know but we need to ask him. I sent Hal and Teresa a whole box of stuff because I thought maybe—the western folk life's in there—would know somebody that could convert those films because nobody knew how around here at the time.

AW:

Yeah. I don't think they have any capacity. Steve Green is a good archivist, but he doesn't have any resources and that's the problem.

BR:

I know. I've been to his office he doesn't have—

AW:

Yeah he's just—

BR:

And the folk life center doesn't have the capacity to do things. Since Hal and Teresa moved, I don't know if they got rid of that stuff or gave it to the folk life center.

AW:

Well, why don't you call them, I don't mind calling them but it would really be more appropriate for you to do that.

BR:

I will call them and see what they did with that and say that you all have the capacity to do all that stuff if they didn't throw it away because they moved. I don't know, whatever—

AW:

Yeah we'd be glad to. I don't think they would, I don't think they would. I'd be really surprised if they got rid of it. They may have turned it over to the folk life center, that's possible, but they wouldn't throw it away. But no if we can help on that we'd sure like to.

BR:

Yeah, yeah. Anyway, that's who Janie was. But in college, Barbara Willbanks and I we became best friends, and I asked Buck on our first date, it was Corrigan week. I guess I was probably a sophomore in college, and I needed a date to the dance, and I asked Buck to go. I remember I went over to pick him up, I don't know if we were double dating or what, but anyway, I remember when I went in to pick him up Buck wasn't ready or something. And I was talking to his mother and I already knew his little sister because when Buck was in New York he would write letters and Sylvia sent me a letter which I think I gave to Amanda that Buck had written her about how she should get acquainted with me because I was a good person, and she could do worse for a friend, or something real complimentary of me. I never heard him say any of that. But that letter, he was encouraging her to become friends with me because I think she might've wanted to start to Amarillo College but I don't think she did I think she and Mark got married when they were pretty young. I think she may have married him and started working and helped Mark get through some of his college but I don't think he finished at West Texas. Anyway, we would write letters back and forth while he was in New York, and then he would come home from New York and he'd come to see me and we'd just be friends and talk. He'd walk me home from college classes and stuff. But he was dating Jeanie when he finally came home after he left New York, after he left the Ted Mack Amateur Hour. He came here and started working for Malcom, and they'd go to the bars. Her dad owned that Panhandle Barn Dance [00:50:06], and she was a great dancer. She's the one that really taught Buck. He loved to dance, and he was a

great dancer but she's the one that really taught him all the fun moves—the moves and all that stuff, all the twists and turns, everything. Because her dad owned Panhandle Barn Dance [?] and they danced all the time and her little sister danced, Charlotte. He was dating her.

AW:

What was her last name?

BR:

Jeanie Downs.

AW:

D-o-w-n-e-s or without—

BR:

Just s.

AW:

Just an s.

BR:

She had been dating a guy named Wesley, and I don't remember Wesley's last name. But there's a road named after his family because his family had land out there on the East side of town. I think they had a little ranch or something and he had horses and maybe a few cattle, I don't remember. And they had been dating since junior high, and all junior high and high school. Then Buck started going to the Pen Ale Barn Dance [?] and then he and Jeanie—I was lead to believe that they were just good friends, but they were more than good friends. I decided even though I had a crush on Buck that if he—I somehow got acquainted with Jeanie that—Buck complained because I always got acquainted with his girlfriends, and I really liked them. [AW laughs]

AW:

That's a real plus for you. I don't even bring up old girl friends to my wife and we've been married almost fifty years.

BR:

Yeah and I always liked all of them really well. So I actually got to know Jeanie the summer before I went to West Texas and she asked me to room with her, so I did. She was ahead of me because she had already started there. That first semester that I was at WT, I roomed with her but she was going to graduate. The second semester she went away to do her practice teaching, and all of that. We'd double date, well, Buck—let's see, Buck was-- he still would go see Barbara Willbanks too when she would come home from wherever she was. She went to Texas and then

she moved to Dallas and became an airline hostess, and was flying for Pan Am all over the world. When she would come home, he would go and visit her, [AW picks up recorder] and by then I was dating Johnny Regal, which we had known in high school.

AW:

And spell Johnny's last name.

BR:

R-e-g-a-l.

AW:

Just like you would think?

BR:

Uh-huh. And I really liked him a lot. He was—well, Buck was the first guy that I ever really kissed, that was when I was a sophomore. Because after I had that Corrigan date, we kind of had a few dates, but I was dating other people.

AW:

This—when you were a sophomore in college?

BR:

In college. Buck was working, he was gone doing this, doing that. He'd come back and visit and interrupt my life saying we were just friends. But then, we started a romance, but then I found out about Jeanie Downs, and decided that, Well if he was in love with her or they had this romance then I just needed to still be friends with him, so I would just be friends. I went away to Dallas that summer and worked for my sister, they had a boarding house. Her husband was going to seminary and they had these guys, and my sister Phyllis didn't like to cook and she wanted me to come up and help her with the boarding house. So I spent my summer in a hot kitchen in Dallas making pies and meals for those guys that were going to that Christian seminary. That was my summer, but that was the summer that—I remember that Barbara Willbanks and I were these really good friends, and I remember burning all of Buck's letters, and just getting rid of all the mementoes and everything. I was real dramatic, and I buried all the ashes and everything under this beautiful white peace rose that mother had out in the back yard or something, it was very dramatic. The worst thing that Barbara Willbanks and I could think to do when we would get together in college, when we'd be real frustrated with the men in our lives. We'd go and buy a package of cigarettes and smoke them until we just got tired. We never inhaled but we'd just puff on those cigarettes like we were grown up that was our big deal. But anyway, Buck was in both of our lives back and forth. Then I somehow became friends with Jeanie and we were roommates. But then when Barbara came to town—I remember me and Johnny and Buck and

Barbara Willbanks going to that dang night club over on—at the time we called it Northeast 8th but it was Amarillo Blvd. It's one that Buck would regularly get kicked out of for causing a ruckus or something but we went. I'd never been to that nightclub, and I've never been back since. But somebody came by and took a picture of us and I have that picture somewhere. I'm sitting across the table from Buck and Barbara but I'm leaning on the table—

AW:

I've seen this picture.

BR:

Listening to Buck and you can see that I still have this crush on him.

AW:

You've showed me that picture. It's a great photograph.

BR:

It is.

AW:

I mean it's like an entire story right there in the photo.

BR:

Yeah and I'll give it to y'all. That's what Chuck Milner saw, and he wrote that Bette's cowboy hunk seeing that picture and me explaining that you know. Amanda's telling them that I'm sitting across the table. Amanda ended up telling Johnny Regal that, one time when we saw him. Johnny—when I was in college, I was dating Johnny and I really liked him a lot, and Buck said you're like some junior high school girl that's just started out learning how to smooch. I really liked kissing Johnny Regal, he's the first guy I ever really went out and smooched with other than Buck. I didn't kiss—I'm telling you I had a crush on Buck, and I didn't want to kiss—I thought, I don't have to kiss any of these high school guys, I don't like them. I'd have a date and I would be just—I'd be so nervous and petrified. When we'd get out of the movie and start home, I would hug the door and I couldn't get in the house fast enough because I didn't want anybody to ask me if they could kiss me goodnight. Because when I was a sophomore, I dated this guy named Dwan Able and he was a senior, and he was pretty popular, he didn't win senior favorite but he won like the runner up. I guess that's where he saw me because I won high school sophomore favorite. I guess he saw me at that whatever—that dance or whatever, and he asked me out. I was nervous because I had never dated a senior and I was just a sophomore. He asked me if he could kiss me goodnight and I told him no, and then he kissed me anyway. The reason I didn't want to kiss anybody is because I didn't know how, and I thought, I don't know how to kiss. All these other girls in junior high would talk about French kissing, and I'd say, "Yuck,"

you know. They'd have these, we'd call them lemon squeezes and they'd start telling all this. I didn't know any of that, I just thought I didn't know how and I'm just not going to and I didn't want to because I liked Buck anyway. But DeJuan Able—

AW:

How do you spell DeJuan?

BR:

I think it was d capital D-e- capital J-u-a-n I think that's—

AW:

Oh like De-Juan.

BR:

DeJuan yeah. I never would go out and park out in the country or any of that because I was too big a coward for any of that, but he'd park in front of my house. I had a few dates with him, I probably didn't have that many, probably somewhere between six and ten. We were sitting out in front of my house, and he was kissing me and he said, "Bette, I just love to kiss you. You are just wonderful at kissing." Which I was surprised at because I didn't think I knew how or anything. He said, "But I just get the feeling that you don't get anything out of it. Do you get any kind of feeling out of it?" I thought about it for a minute and I said, "Well, not really." [Laughter]

AW:

Oh that was cold.

BR:

You don't ask the question if you don't want the answer, and I never had any more dates with him after that. But after that I thought, If I don't want to kiss anybody I don't have to. That's just ridiculous for me to do that. I thought, Well I'm just not going to kiss anybody. So then I think I got the reputation around the school that I didn't kiss or anything. It was college before—and it was Buck before I ever kissed anybody else. The first time he kissed me goodnight at the door, I was staying over at Melinda's, and Melinda didn't like Buck.

AW:

Now Melinda was?

BR:

My really good friend that was—she was this troubled girl. Lawrence Hagy, the one that developed the oil business in Amarillo and was mayor of Amarillo at the same time that Franklin, Delano Roosevelt was president, and there are pictures of Hagy and Roosevelt riding in

a parade when Roosevelt came out about the drought and everything. Well that was Hagy was mayor, but Hagy was married to Melinda's mom who was Zachary Scott's sister. She was beautiful, her mom was beautiful her name was Anne Scott, and she had all these relatives in Amarillo that I'm trying to remember. It's a ranching family where the guy had—Sally Lee Scott, and that was Anne's mother, and the Kritcher's [?] [01:02:13], Anabelle and whatever else the other ones name was, Kritcher and the Fanes, and they had this big Weymouth. Anyway he had four daughters and he divided up his big ranch between those four daughters. Anne was an heir, and her sister was Mary Lee and she married the king ranch guy. So when Melinda graduated from high school she got a king ranch horse for graduation, a stud horse, for graduation from her aunt. All those king ranch people were related, and then Zachary was married to someone first and they had a daughter named Waverley, and then he and his first wife divorced and his first wife married John Steinbeck. So when we were in college—

AW:
John Steinbeck?

BR:
The writer.

AW:
The author?

BR:
Yeah and so—

AW:
Grapes of Wrath.

BR:
Grapes of Wrath, Red Pony. Melinda, he send Melinda a signed copy of *The Red Pony*. She called him Uncle John, and he wrote her letters. Barbara Willbanks and I had read John Steinbeck and, we really liked his writing in high school and college. We wrote him this letter, and he wrote Melinda an answer to this letter that we all got together when we were staying over at Melinda's, because she became friends with Melinda too. Anyway, Melinda was this person in high school that I befriended because one of my favorite teachers in high school had taken Melinda under her wing because Melinda was this troubled daughter of Anne Scott, who had married commander, by then, and they had adopted—Hagy and Anne had adopted Melinda and Eliza as sisters. Melinda was really this beautiful little wide-eyed girl. Eliza had not been born yet, and they adopted her unborn, and then she had some kind of like measles or something, had a high temperature and there was a risk that she might have some kind of brain impairment but

they adopted her anyway. Which was lucky for Eliza because she got sent to that really great school out in California where all these very wealthy people—that guy that was the cosmetic guy, Max Factor, his son was there, Mark who was extremely talented. But I took care—when Eliza would come out here and I was in college, Hagy hired me to take care—to be the caretaker of Eliza because she had to come home so many months or so many weeks. I don't know, however—because he had a trust fund for her and in order for all of that to be the way it should be, for Eliza to inherit or whatever, she had to come home and spend time in Texas.

AW:

When you say you took care of her was her impairment physical, mental?

BR:

It was mental. She had the brain of about a six year old or something. She could sing, she had a beautiful voice. Her long term memory—you know it's the short term memory that was so affected, but she could remember the color of the dress I had on the first time I ever saw her. Doris and I went to see her a couple of—two or three Christmases ago. She could remember everything about me and Doris because Doris—Barbara Willbanks little sister, loved horses and became Melinda's friend too and started going on some trips with Melinda when I didn't go and went to North Carolina with Melinda and did all the horse jumping. Melinda was really in to all the ranch stuff. That's where I started going to Hagy's ranch and was around Partner and all those old cowboys, I just loved all those old cowboys and would listen to their stories, and all their colloquialisms I just loved being around all them. That's where I first got bucked off of a horse, going out, early morning round up with the cowboys and all that stuff. Went to my first branding, and had to go behind the pickup, because all the calves were crying and the blood was spirting, and I just thought it was really brutal. That poor little guy that was about two years standing by that fence all dressed up in his cowboy outfit, and he was just crying, his daddy came over and picked him up and whopped him two or three times on the rear-end and said, "You just—don't you dare cry, you just stand up like a man, you don't cry." I thought well its brutal you know, he's seeing all the blood spirting and the calves crying. I went behind the pickup and tried to knock away the tears because I had never seen anything like that. But I learned a lot and you know kind of got toughened up after a while to all that stuff.

AW:

But, Melinda didn't like Buck?

BR:

No, she didn't like Buck.

AW:

They seem like people that would like each other.

BR:

It seemed like they would. I think Buck always thought that she was—he always thought she might've been a closet lesbian or something. She was rough and tough, but she was really just a scared little girl. I knew Melinda inside out, and I was probably one of the only people in high school that liked her for what she was and I didn't want anything from her. I didn't want any of her money, I didn't want anything but I got a lot of fringe benefits from being her good friend. And I think—

AW:

Well, you got to write a letter to John Steinbeck.

BR:

Yeah. Hagy really liked me, and I'm sure he went over and talked to the teachers.

AW:

Real quickly would you spell Hagy?

BR:

H-a-g-y.

AW:

Okay I thought that was it but I wanted—

BR:

And I'm sure he went over and talked to the teachers. They had had so much trouble with Melinda they couldn't keep her in school. What nobody knew, what Hagy didn't know, and what—I don't know if her mom knew, and I don't think Melinda—if Melinda told her mom she probably didn't believe it. But her step father was an alcoholic, and her mom traveled—would go away sometimes and go visit her family or do whatever and Melinda would be there with just commander, and he was like an episcopal, he was a retired navy commander that's why they called him commander.

AW:

What was his last name?

BR:

Oh—

AW:

That's all right if you can't.

BR:

I can't remember right now I'll remember it maybe sometime.

AW:

But commander was his nickname?

BR:

Commander was his nickname, and he was an Episcopalian minister at the time in California. They lived in Ojai in that beautiful valley, in this beautiful home up on the hills and everything. When Melinda graduated from high school she got a brand new car, it was a station wagon, and a horse trailer from Hagy, and got the horse from the King Ranch. We were going to go to California, and we were going to stay with her mom, and just be in California for a while. I think my dad was real upset with my mom for letting me do that, but my mom let me go, and Hagy planned this trip, he was real good at planning things, and had this trip where we could go and stay at the Grand Canyon and do all this stuff. Well, I have a real good story about Grand Canyon I'll tell you in a minute. Anyway Melinda and I started out doing that, and I stayed over at Hagy's house a lot during my senior year in high school, and I spent a lot of time with Melinda, she needed a friend, and I was a good friend. We'd go to the ranch all the time and I loved going to the ranch because he had the beautiful ranch, it was a multi-millionaire's ranch so of course, it was beautiful.

AW:

So the fences were nice and—

BR:

Oh it had all the nice fences. Hagy was a very frugal multi-millionaire. He knew how to pick up old hammers and buy new handles for them, and buy old, like storage barrels for the—he taught me a lot of things about taking old things and making them good, and not spending. He would darn his own socks and— Really. [AW Laughs]

AW:

Really?

BR:

He showed me how to darn socks and how to clean his own ties. The liquor people would send him cases, he had this liquor closet and they'd send him cases of free liquor. I don't know if he ever even had to buy any liquor, but good liquor for his liquor closet. I never drank anything at that time, I didn't drink until I was twenty one, I was pretty much already graduated from college before I ever had my first drink. My dad bought my first drink. I remember—well I'll tell that story in a minute because I'm still talking about Hagy and Melinda but anyway, I don't even

know where I need to start. Buck was off wondering around working with Malcolm at Branches—

AW:

You were talking about Melinda and her stepfather.

BR:

Yeah, oh, her stepfather. What Hagy did not know is her step father got drunk when Anne was off doing something, and came in and raped Melinda when she was just a young girl.

AW:

When she was in high school?

BR:

No she was younger, probably junior high. Melinda had a really good friend that kept her horse, you know they had a horse, they kept her horse, and she really loved that guy, and he might've known. Because I remember meeting him, he was a really nice person. When Hagy was having—well this goes back to the Grand Canyon story and everything, which I'll tell you about. Bill, his name was Bill and he just kept those horses, really nice looking man and Melinda loved him. He was like a father figure to Melinda until she came back, and Hagy took her when she was a senior in high school. My teacher that I really liked a lot, wanted me to befriend Melinda, and had me come in at my study hall hour, and had Melinda come in, and we would be there together, and that's how we became friends. Melinda had this little car, it was a little English car that she drove around, so we could drive around in that cute little. It was like a Cooper or something I don't remember. Just one of those—

AW:

Oh an Austin Cooper?

BR:

Yeah cute little cars. But at first, before Hagy got that car for her to drive around, and have her own car and license. He always had a chauffeur named Morris that—Morris worked for Hagy and would do things like shine his shoes, and do other stuff but he would drive him to work and pick him up. Hagy always had a black Fleetwood Cadillac, that's what the wealthy multi-millionaires in Amarillo—Rip Underwood and all those guys that started the oil business, drove black Fleetwood Cadillacs. They didn't drive themselves, they had a chauffeur that drove them and did the extra stuff. So Morris would drive Melinda around and Melinda got acquainted with Morris. When we were seniors in high school Melinda was having an affair with—and Morris was in his forties and I was just appalled.

AW:

She was having an affair with Morris?

BR:

Yes unbeknownst to Hagy. But I knew because Melinda would tell me, I was just appalled. I think she liked to shock me you know and tell me all this. I thought, He's forty-seven years old, ick. He was ugly and I thought Melinda how can you do that. But anyway, Buck thought she was probably a closet lesbian and was jealous. I think she was jealous, because Melinda didn't have any friends.

AW:

Yeah and so the time you spent with Buck was time away from her.

BR:

Yeah if Buck was—yeah I think that was it. She never ever showed any signs of being a lesbian to me. I was her friend and I was a true friend because I didn't want anything but Hagy would—I remember going to Oklahoma City to visit Hagy's sister, and she lived in those beautiful hills, and everything was fancy-smancy. I just got exposed to a lot of the wealthy multi-millionaires side of life in Amarillo. That's why I'm totally unimpressed with all those founders because when you see Lee Bivens sitting around the table so drunk, eating the nasturtiums which was the centerpiece off of the table, and being so drunk that he falls into his plate of food you're not very impressed with all those multi-millionaire guys. Then going to Hagy's ranch, he bought that ranch as a tax write off and he told me you can run for so many years and not make a profit but then you have to—after so many years you have to make a profit. He would always see that he did that. But those guys bought their ranches for tax purposes. He would invite—he kept it stocked with quail and dove and fed them you know, had all these feeders around because they liked to hunt and stuff. Kept the natural spring stocked with fish and stuff like that for his friends to go down there to get drunk, and party, and hunt, and fish, and do all those kinds of things. Sometimes when I would be there they would—especially when Anne came down to visit Eliza, and we spent time together, they would come down and we'd feed them, cook food and all that kind of stuff. But I spent a lot of time at the ranch with Eliza and then Melinda would come down too. I never liked—Melinda had dogs and horses and I'd go to the dog training schools and all that—the dog shows, things like that with Melinda in high school and early college. On our way—when she graduated and we were going—we met this guy who was a Mormon named Lee Mathias. He saw Melinda with a new horse trailer, the horse, the station wagon, he was this Mormon guy that hung around Grand Canyon. They had those hang around people that—worthless kind of guys.

AW:

Can you spell his last name?

BR:

Mathias. I think it was M-a-t-h-i-a-s and he was from Mesa, Arizona. Well, we were staying—Hagy had made arrangements for us to stay at a cabin and be in Grand Canyon, and Amanda to board her horse, and blah, blah, blah.

AW:

Melinda?

BR:

Huh?

AW:

To board her horse?

BR:

Yeah.

AW:

You said Amanda.

BR:

No, Melinda to board her horse and all this stuff. We got to be at Grand Canyon for several days. Melinda got acquainted with this guy and he showed some interest—

AW:

The Mormon guy?

BR:

The Mormon guy and he had all these places that he wanted her to go see and all this stuff. Well, I didn't trust this guy you know, I did have sense enough not to trust this guy. He wanted us both to go on some kind of excursion. Of course, Melinda wanted to go and I didn't want to go, so I elected to stay in Grand Canyon. By this time I had gotten acquainted with some guy that was kin to the Babbitt's, which I didn't have a clue who the Babbitt's were but that was the big name in Arizona I guess—Grand Canyon.

AW:

Yeah Bruce Babbitt. That is from that family.

BR:

Yeah. All that stuff. Yeah and so his uncle was the head of the whole Grand Canyon area because he was in that family. His mother had sent him, I guess he was this kid that she had that kind of didn't know what to do with himself, but he was a nice kid, and sent him to work at the Grand Canyon with his uncle for the summer. So I got acquainted with him because I'd go up—well Melinda left me at the Grand Canyon with all our luggage and Lyric who was the dog, the big German Sheppard dog, and took off with Lee on whatever they were going to go do. Well unbeknownst to me the cabin that we had rented was only rented for a certain amount of time, and Melinda had left me with the suitcases, and Lyric and there were a lot of suitcases, a lot of luggage, and then our cabin was supposed to be vacated. Well, here I was stuck in the cabin with Lyric and all these suitcases at seventeen years old, and Melinda didn't come back on the day that she was supposed to come back see. So I ended up having to call Mr. Hagy. I was frustrated because I didn't know where else I could go, because you know people rent those cabins months in advance.

AW:

Sometimes years in advance.

BR:

Years in advance, and the cleaning lady had told me that all the cabins were—there wasn't any place for me to stay. Here I was with all these suitcases and Lyric, stranded. Of course—so I call Hagy. Well Hagy calls the head honcho and they find me one of the first cabins that was ever put in Grand Canyon. Which had—it did have a bathroom, it had one light bulb on a cord hanging down in the middle of the room, it had the screens all the way around and the boards that you put up outside.

AW:

This was more like a tent.

BR:

Yeah and it had a bed. But it was a place that I could get, and he got the cleaning people to help me move the luggage and the dog and everything. Hagy, evidentially, made arrangements to pay for everything that I needed, because here Melinda was off dilly-bopping around. I had to tell him that she wasn't back yet and I was worried but she would be back eventually. Anyways, so he made arrangements, I'm sure that worried him to death. But he made arrangements for me to have whatever I needed. Well I had Lyric, and he was a good dog. I would take Lyric, I'd put him on a leash and put him outside and I would go up to the main place at the Grand Canyon at night, and then that guy, you know, the kid that I had met, that Babbitt guy who I didn't know from Adam about Babbitts until he told me all about the Babbitts. Then I read that story about the Babbitts, the Updike stuff, and eventually learned a little bit more later on when I was in

college. Anyway, he would walk me home to the pitiful cabin because it was dark and late at night but we'd have Lyric, he'd walk me and see that I got in my door okay because he was a gentleman. But there would be these college guys over in this cabin drinking and carrying on all night long, and then there would be these college guys on this side. I didn't like being there all by myself in between all these drinking college guys and all this stuff but I did have Lyric. But I would go in, and it was just dark as pitch, and I would be trying to find that one light cord in the cabin, reaching all around until I could finally find the light. I never opened any of those boarded, I just stayed boarded up in that, and I'd sleep in my clothes with the light bulb on, half way sleep you know hearing those people all night long just worrying if—

AW:

And then with the light on.

BR:

--every car that drove up—yeah with the light on. Every car that drove up, I'd think it would be Melinda. One morning—

AW:

So, how long did this go on?

BR:

Several days, I don't remember I was there several days like that. Finally one morning I was laying in the bed sleeping in my clothes, lights on, Lyric. Here comes Melinda walking in. Now Melinda was a privileged young woman that was used to the best of everything, she walked in and said, "What the hell are you doing in a dump like this?" I looked at her and I said, Oh, don't you say a word to me. Don't you say one word. We are lucky to have any—this is the only place in this whole canyon that was available. You left, and left me with all these suitcases, all these—Lyric." I said, pretty much the day after you left, we got evicted from that wonderful little cabin which wasn't all that great either but it did have amenities in it, better amenities. That was my Grand Canyon experience and I never wanted to go back to the Grand Canyon until—

AW:

I can see why.

BR:

Until Amanda and this was after Buck died, wanted to see the Grand Canyon. This is when she was living in Utah, and I went out to see her and so I said, "Well okay Melinda, we'll go—I mean Amanda—we'll go over and see the Grand Canyon." So we drove over on purpose to see the Grand Canyon and got a place to stay a little ways outside the canyon. Drove over—well it might have been in the canyon because it was at an off-season time of year, and drove over to see

the canyon. It was so foggy and it stayed foggy that Amanda never got to see the Grand Canyon. I don't know to this day if she's seen it or not, but that was our purpose in going. That was the first time I've ever went back because of that experience. But that wasn't the only time Melinda left me deserted because we got to Ojai and we were having this wonderful experience with her mother and commander, and that's the first time I'd ever been to any place where we had to dress for dinner. We had to have the right spoon and fork and you know everything was frou-frou in Ojai. The first—I think it was maybe the first evening that we had dinner, we had these little silver things sitting by each plate, and I took these little spoons and put a bunch of this in my tea glass, and then I took a drink of tea and I must've made this horrible face because her mom looked at me. I said there's something wrong with my tea, well it was the little salt thing you know it looked like a little sugar bowl with a little salt spoon that I didn't have sense enough to know about. I'd put salt in my tea and I was real embarrassed because they had all these fancy schmancy things that I had not been exposed to that much in my life, Hagy was pretty informal.

AW:

Yeah if he was that—

BR:

He was a bachelor and we would—

AW:

Self-reliant.

BR:

Would eat on TV trays, and he had all kinds of nice things, but I didn't go to the dinner party. We'd eat on TV trays and I loved the cooking that his maid did, she made the most wonderful foods, and I got exposed to a lot of really good cooking with Lela the maid. LeLe is what Melinda called her. So I got exposed to that side of—the fancy side of the multi-millionaire life.

AW:

Yeah let me ask a question real quickly about commander, and the mom, and Melinda. You'd go out and have this fancy dinner now. Do you know by this time that he had raped—

BR:

Oh no. I didn't know any of that until years later.

AW:

Got it. Okay. I was just wondering what that would have been like to been into that situation.

BR:

No, I had no idea. What ended up happening—we went to Ojai and we were there maybe, I don't know, we were there maybe a week, and Melinda got crossways with—I don't know if it was commander or her mom or both, and Melinda was going to leave. I was in a pair of shorts I remember, and Melinda was just—she just packed her suitcase and I guess—I don't know—I guess—I'm not sure whether she got her horse or not, I don't remember. She got in her brand new station wagon and was going to go back to Lee Mathias.

AW:

The fellow she'd already been—

BR:

Oh yeah, that she'd been out running around with all this time. I think he was encouraging her to come back, and they were going to get married, and live happily ever after, all that stuff, which I didn't know. But I got in the car with her just in my shorts and she left me, I think it was in a little town a few miles from Ojai because I was not going to go back with that Mormon guy. No. I was going to stay where I was with Melinda's mom until something else—I figured I could stay there for a little while and figure out-- well anyways, so here I was deserted again in California in a pair of shorts. Luckily, I guess I had her mom's number, I don't know, anyway I did call the mom, and the mom drove over to pick me up. I did stay with the mom and commander for a couple of weeks. With Melinda out, nobody knew where she was. Wondering around with this Lee guy. So the end result of that was, Hagy called me—I came back and started Amarillo college, and didn't have Melinda in my life, and started being a regular college girl making my own life again, being happily ensconced in—I loved Amarillo college, was being active, didn't have Melinda to take care of and all of that. Started making friends, pledged the sorority, and got accepted to the one I wanted to be in because that's where all the social life was, started having a good social life, good friends, and having fun. Somewhere along around Christmas time, Hagy calls me and wants me to join him and fly to Denver to the Brown Palace, and Melinda was going to get married, she wanted me to be her brides—you know, her best—

AW:

Maid of honor?

BR:

Maid of honor.

AW:

Was she marrying the—

BR:

She was going to marry the Mormon guy, and you know the mom and dad were going to—Hagy was going to be there, I don't think Anne would go, I think she was so angry with Melinda still, but Hagy went. Hagy had this bottle of champagne, or wine or something that he had gotten in Europe when he was in Hungary and Germany and all over. He was like an officer in the army I don't know what he was, but he was some kind of military guy that got all kinds of privileges. I know he was in Hungary and everything because his ranch house had all these paintings of all these beautiful women with all their titties showing, all different shapes. That's the first time I'd ever been around where you'd go from one room to the next room with all these women you know, these beautiful women, beautiful art, and he had some good art by cowboy people. He had a Remington and he had some other things in the ranch house for all of his friends. They'd go in the card room and play poker being surrounded by all these beautiful Hungarian and different women that had been painted by these Hungarian and different artists. Anyway we went to the brown Palace, and married Melinda, he opened that wonderful bottle that he had been saving for umpteen years. I hated any kind of wine. I remember when I was out it Ojai they exposed me to really good wines and things, but I couldn't stand the taste of anything. I remember going to the Brown Palace—I mean the Brown Derby with Anne and commander, and being exposed to black waiters and waitresses. That's the first time I'd ever been waited on by a black person. You know they didn't let them have jobs here. They were kind of fascinated that I never had been waited on by a black person before, and they would do everything for you. They'd move all your stuff, and do all this fancy stuff. That's where I was exposed to movie stars, and she would introduce me and of course, I was this little high school girl, had my pretty little clothes on, and at then—I had big boobs at that time, so it was hard for me to find something that covered—

AW:

That was modest.

BR:

Well you know I stayed modest, but I would wear these dresses that would have a little bit of—I don't think anything was showing, but it was almost showing. Men would notice the big boobs. That's where some of the guys would stick their cards, and I was just incensed and it was these old guys that I really liked in the movies.

AW:

So who were some of the people that you met?

BR:

It was that guy that had the German—that always had the sausages with the German accent, I cannot remember his name, but he was always a butcher or something in a lot of those early movies that had Judy Garland and some of those people. The guy that wore the glasses, that I

always thought was just such a neat guy, until I met him and he stuck his card down my dress. I didn't like him anymore after that. Then I ran into the one that always wanted to be alone, that real famous silent movie star that—she was a foreigner that came, I think she was Swedish or something, and by then she was, to me, she just looked like an old lady with gray hair, with tons of dogs. We got on the elevator with her and she was just real snippy and rude getting on the elevator—just acted like this entitled person with this young guy looking after her, taking care of all of her multi—I don't know she had probably six or seven dogs, some kind of little dogs with her. What was her name? She was the one that always wanted to be alone.

AW:

Yeah, I'm not placing—

BR:

You know who I'm thinking of—beautiful.

AW:

Yeah, not like Hedy Lamarr.

BR:

Not Hedy Lamarr, before her. She was never in a—

AW:

Talky.

BR:

A talky.

AW:

Oh, okay.

BR:

Yeah she was way back when, by then she was old, because I was seventeen.

AW:

So the time period of Clara Bow in that—

BR:

Yeah at that time. That beautiful woman, I'll think of it and tell you later. But she was very beautiful in her younger days and had the painted eyebrows, I remember that's back when they had the painted eyebrows. The Gloria Swanson days you know. Well, Gloria Swanson did do

one or two—some of the talking ones. Even pre Gloria Swanson I guess, maybe she did talk some. I didn't ever see—I've seen some of her movies since then, but I didn't have a clue who she was at dinner. Some of those people, I'd see them but a lot of those movie stars you didn't recognize in person because they were so made up,, but they were all around the Brown Derby and I got introduced to a bunch of them. But I was not impressed, I wasn't impressed with the money people, or the movie stars, by the time I was a senior you know seventeen years old, and still I'm not because I've met some of them since then, and I'm still not impressed. Anyway, it was a grand time while I was in Ojai, but then I came back and started college. Well by the time—I think I got through my freshman year of college, but by the time my freshman year was over, Melinda's marriage was over because Lee was shooting through the walls, and he was crazy, he was doing crazy things. Going through Melinda's money and you know.

AW:

Were they living in Arizona?

BR:

They were living in Mesa, Arizona, and I think Melinda had gotten her fill of living with a Mormon. I don't know that he was a practicing Mormon or—

AW:

It doesn't sound like it.

BR:

I don't think so because he was drinking, and doing crazy things, and she moved back. That's about the time Buck came around because he was—

AW:

Okay let's stop right here for a minute. I have to change batteries, and we can take back up with Buck coming over if you want to, or if you want to take a longer break we can do that too.

BR:

Well, I'm going to make some tea and what time is it? How about some lunch for you?

AW:

We could have some lunch, but some tea would certainly be good.

BR:

What do you want? I have all the—

AW:

Just some leftovers would be fine.

BR:

Okay. Well what kind of leftovers do you want? I have—

AW:

We don't need to record that, let me stop the—people will be complaining about my dietary habits. I'm going to shut this down and change batteries.

BR:

All right.

[Pause recording]

AW:

For the recorder saying we're back on the seventh of March 2016. Andy Wilkinson with Bette Ramsey, we just had a wonderful lunch for those of you listening to this many years later, it was really great, I'll just tell you. [Door opens and slams shut 01:45:14]

Amanda Ramsey (AR):

Getting a lot of attention, mom.

AW:

When we stopped for lunch, we had gotten through the Grand Canyon story and kind of found out about Melinda. One thing I meant to ask and didn't, is Melinda still alive?

BR:

Yes she is. Hagy died in his nineties, he died while he was getting ready to go to a party. One of the things about Hagy—he was in his nineties, I think, and he didn't drive at all anymore. He had—let's say it was Melinda's third husband—he had him go to work for him at the First National Bank, and kind of start looking after his assets and everything. JB was good to Melinda, and he was good to her kids. Hagy left Melinda's kids trust funds and things like that, and also Eliza's trust, and so he had JB looking after all of his finances, even though Melinda divorced JB eventually. They still are friends, which is unusual because she's not friends with either one of her other husbands. But JB she's friends with, and he takes care of all of her finances, which is good because Melinda doesn't know how to—she thinks she does but she doesn't. He kind of doles out the money to her and to her children. Of course, he's well paid I'm sure, but First National Bank wanted to get rid of him, and take over Hagy's—

AW:

Yeah because they would make money.

BR:

Oh yeah. Melinda wouldn't—she said no way she didn't trust them which is good, she did have sense enough not to trust the bankers. She sold the Bitter Creek Ranch, which was one of my favorite ranches that they had. I think it went for about six million but it might've been more, I don't remember for sure. She bought a ranch in Arizona on the border, and did a lot of upgrades and things on that, and ended up selling it. When I hear Melinda talk, she talks like she makes money, but when I hear JB talk it's like she might break even but she spends so much fixing things up. Now she's been through several different—like when Anne died she inherited her mother's money and stuff, which Anne had beautiful furniture, and beautiful appointments, and beautiful things and Melinda went to North Carolina, and moved her mother's things back here. Commander had a couple of daughters that Anne liked real well, and they may've gotten some things, she may have left some things, but Melinda got the bulk of everything, so she had all that. She had a house in Wolflin, and she sold that house, and then she had an apartment here, and I'm not sure if she still has the apartment or not. But Eliza had a house, and they sold that house then Eliza bought Diane Saunders's [?] [01:49:52] house. So as far as I know Eliza still has Diane Saunders house. Then Melinda bought a ranch—she bought all that land in Hawaii on Molokai Island, and Molokai is where they have the leper colony, so a lot of people are still fearful of that. They do have—they have a ranch on the opposite side of the island from where Melinda is, and they are beginning to develop the island away from where the leper colony is. But it wasn't developed, and Melinda—now she was in her sixties and this was after Buck died, after buck died Melinda invited me to go to Hawaii because she sold that ranch in Arizona, and then bought a ranch down by Tyler. Then she had that land that she had in Hawaii. Her idea was, that eventually she would sell the ranch in Tyler and move to Hawaii permanently, but in the meantime—and before she bought the ranch in Tyler she had the apartment in Amarillo, and would go to Hawaii for the winter months, and then come stay in the apartment through the summer. But even before that she had that really nice house in the Wolflin area that she sold and bought some land outside—kind of out there between Canyon and Amarillo, and had some acreage, and built like, I think it was about a million dollar barn for horses with the arena and everything, and this beautiful house. Every house that she has owned, she's had that Harris decorator guy, who I don't think he's alive any longer, I think that was his name, but anyway he was an older guy that decorated Hagy's house that's decorated all of Melinda's houses and they've been beautiful. But she had that house out there with a lot of her mother's beautiful things in that big barn, the arena and all that. She sold all that, I think that must've been after Hagy died. The Arizona thing, and the Hawaii, thing and the Tyler thing, I think she still has the Tyler ranch, and she does all the barrel riding. She's been down there—

AW:

She still rides?

BR:

Well, she was still riding. Then she had a horse wreck and broke her pelvis and they told her she'd never walk again, but she did. The year Buck died she invited me to come to Hawaii for Christmas, and I told Amanda that I really wanted to be away, because that had been a really bad year.

AW:

So this was almost a year— this was the year after—

BR:

Yeah the following Christmas after he died, yeah.

AW:

Following Christmas.

BR:

So I went to Hawaii, and Melinda had rented a beach house on Molokai. Then we would hop planes to all the other islands and stay different places. Because she had property in Hawaii, she got Hawaiian rates instead of tourist rates, which was a lot cheaper. Of course, Melinda expects the best so we had a real, like a five star vacation in Hawaii for a lot cheaper than it would've cost me if I'd of— but we stayed at some very beautiful places. She was trying to show me a wonderful time and I was still grieving, but I did have a really good time with her. She was hobbling around, because she had still had—she's crippled up some now from those broken bones. We went to Molokai—you know to the beach house in Molokai, and she was telling me all that she was planning on doing. I said, "Melinda, you are over sixty years old. There's no development, this is just land," and they have something like the mesquite bush but that's not what it is, but it's very invasive. And she—

AW:

It's actually it's akin to the mesquite.

BR:

I guess it is. What is that? I can't remember what it's called.

AW:

Here's how I know because that mesquite guitar I have, that's where the mesquite comes from is Hawaii.

BR:

Oh okay. Well it is akin to the mesquite.

AW:

Yeah but I think it's a little bigger, the trunks or something.

BR:

Yeah. Her property was full of that, and then it had the lava beaches, which was hard on your feet, so nobody wants to be on that. It didn't have any water or any electricity. She had quite a bit of acreage, I don't remember how much, I don't have any idea, but up the mountain and down to the ocean. I said, "You're telling me that they don't have anybody that can shoe your horses, they don't have any of your barrel stuff that you would have to transport your horses to a different island, to get shoed, and to do your barrel stuff if you're still going to ride." But I said, "You broke your pelvis, and you're over sixty years old, you are being foolish to keep doing this. You know, you're risking being crippled up," because they told her she wouldn't ever walk again. She was determined she would and she did, but she was still hobbling around, and of course, I was grieving. I didn't have as much patience and ability as I normally have with Melinda. Anyway, she did try to show me a wonderful time, and we went to all the islands except the big one we didn't go. She offered to take me there, but I was just tired of hoping on planes, and islands, and seeing so much stuff, I just wanted to go to the beach house and just enjoy resting, and relaxing a little bit, instead of hoping all over everywhere. I remember, we were at the beach house on New Year's, and I was determined that I was going to see that year completely gone. So I started where they started the new year celebration, and went all the way across until the end and it was like two or three in the morning that I was on the porch of the beach house making sure that the year was gone. Watching the neighbors try to outdo each other doing fireworks. One would do one, and of course, it was over the ocean, which made it much more dramatic and wonderful. And it was wonderful being in Hawaii at Christmas time because they had all the poinsettias—I mean they had huge bushes of poinsettias and poinsettia trees. All the palm trees were decorated with lights—it was just a totally different kind of Christmas, but it was really neat. But, I don't know what I did, I don't think I did anything on that trip, I finally got home and wrote her a really nice note and everything, but we didn't talk after that trip. And then Janie Fristo [?] [01:59:24] stayed at my house when I was gone to China. Actually I had my sister Pat that I wanted to stay here, because she was here in town, and I told her she could be here and stay in my house, and have her friends in and all that kind of stuff. Well, Janie was coming here from Germany, and she had stayed at my house one time before when I was gone and it worked really—she did really well. But when she stayed in my house when I was gone to china, I don't know if she was on some kind of prescription drugs or what, but she had this romance with a guy that she ultimately married again, who was one of the Wittenberg people. It was—a girl that I went to high school with, it was her brother but they met somehow, and she

had this romance, and he smoked cigars, and my house was awful smelling. I had broken all my ribs.

AW:

Right, I remember.

BR:

They had had the light that I had that came on automatically when I would go out at night, it was on the garage, he had that taken down by some electrician that I never knew who it was. And I had to have some electrician come back and put it up. She had wanted to use my car, and my car smelled like cigar smoke, and I was sick anyway, which made it worse. Somebody had spilled one of those cappuccino things on the carpet.

AW:

In your car?

BR:

Yeah, and it was gucky, and then I had to have about five hundred dollars—I don't know how much work I had to have done on it. I mean, there were just all kinds of extra things that I hadn't counted on. You know the wine that was special that you had made when we did the—

AW:

Goodnight.

BR:

Yeah, Goodnight stuff. I had some of that, and they drank that. I had it saved for something special. Just little things. Well anyway, there was just a lot of things that though, Dang. So I never—then Pat was staying here, and Pat told me later that Janie [?] kind of expected her to do the cooking and the cleaning, and Janie would have friends over for Pat to cook for and wait on. Pat called her son, and had him come pick her up, and wouldn't stay here anymore. It was just an comedy of errors there, and then after that, I know several times when I was going to be going or when Janie was going to come over, and Janie and her husband were going to come over, that asked me about—the garage apartment's always rented, thank goodness. But they'd volunteer to house sit, and I never took them up again, because I though, I'm not—no.

AW:

Oh, no. Gosh, that's very un-guest like.

BR:

Well, and it gets expensive because you're paying all the utilities and nobody offered to do anything. You're still paying for the air conditioning, and the water, and whatever. I just though unh-uh not anymore.

AW:

That's crazy. Well we're about out of time today because I've to go back and teach tonight. So what is a good place to say we're going to start—when Buck was coming to pick you up and Melinda was there and didn't like him, because that's where—what started this all.

BR:

Oh yeah Melinda didn't like him ,but he came to pick me up and we went on a date. I don't remember where we went, probably not anything very significant, might've gone to a movie or something. But he kissed me goodnight on the front porch. That's the first time he'd ever kissed me, and that's the first time I ever felt all the bells and whistles.

AW:

Really?

BR:

I did. I remember, Mr. Hagy had a great big winged back chair by the front door, and I opened that front door and my knees felt weak, and I grabbed that winged back chair—the back of it to hold onto and about that time Melinda came walking in from the bedroom. I don't think Hagy was there at the time. he must've been gone on a trip or something. She came walking in to the living room, and she looked at me and I was hanging on to that winged back chair, and she said, "What the hell is the matter with you?" She cussed like a sailor, I never said a cuss word, and then I was around Melinda, which I still didn't say a cuss word, and then Buck started cussing, and then I started using some cuss words, I thought I don't need to do that. But you know, I was hearing them all the time, because I never heard any of them growing up, my dad and mom just didn't. I told her and then she started laughing she said, "Oh, you are so ridiculous." Then she just really didn't—she just didn't like Buck. He was always nice to her, but she just didn't think too much of him.

AW:

Okay, well that is a great place to stop this. And a great place to start from for the next go around.

BR:

Okie dokie.

AW:

All right. Thank you Bette.

BR:

You're welcome.

AW:

Oops. Wrong device, there we go.

[End recording]



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