

**Oral History Interview of
Ernest Pompeo and Tsenre Deveraux**

Interviewed by: Andy Wilkinson

November 14, 2013

Albuquerque, NM

Part of the:

Crossroads Music Archive Interviews

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

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Ernest Pompeo and his daughter Tsenre Deveraux, who discuss their lives, upbringing, their experiences in the business world, and the career of their relative, the painter Anna Keener Wilton.

Length of Interview: 01:07:30

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Keywords

Painting, basketball, automobile business, Western culture, Anna Keener Wilton

Andy Wilkinson (AW):

You won't mind if I'll turn this on,

Ernest Pompeo (EP):

Oh, no—

AW:

--just because we always do—say interesting things when it's turned off. But I will say this is the fourteenth of November 2013, and I'm in the very beautiful home of Ernest Pompeo and his daughter, Sen-ray?

Tsenre Deveraux (TD):

Tuh-sahn-rah.

AW:

Tsenre. Spell that for me.

TD:

It's T-S-E-N-R-E. Which is Ernest—

AW:

Ernest backwards. And your last name?

TD:

My last name is Deveraux.

AW:

D-E-V-E-R-A-U—

TD:

X.

AW:

X. Okay. So I moved back to Texas and went into private business with my father, who was an oil seed products broker. He'd spent his life working with Anderson Clayton, a big food and agricultural products company, and retired with them, and was brokering those things, and I thought, "Well, that's a good thing to get me out of what had been twelve years' worth of police work." I was thirty-two at the time, but I wanted to do music, which is how I wound up at Texas Tech doing this, was to help build up our music collection, music and art collection.

EP:

All right, what type of music were you interested in?

AW:

Good.

EP:

Huh?

AW:

Good music.

TD:

Good music.

AW:

I write music about our part of the world. I have a distant uncle on my father's side named Charlie Goodnight.

EP:

Yes. I see.

AW:

He made the Goodnight-Loving Trail and all these sorts of things. I got—I grew up listening to my grandmother and great-grandmother talk about him, because she knew him—both of them knew him well. They stayed with him when they were little kids. So that kept me really interested in history, and I began to write songs and poems and eventually plays about Goodnight and people like that. Writing those things, I spent a lot of time at the archive, where I now work. And I think they figured they might as well just pay me, since I was hanging out all the time. So I've been doing that for ten years, collecting oral histories and other materials for our archive in some areas. But that brought me back to Lubbock, and I've been back for a long time.

EP:

Well, you'll have to read these, because Tsenre was—she was—did a lot of musical work, and my wife did too. Betty Lou played the violin and some other instruments, and her twin sister played instruments that Betty Lou didn't play. So together, they could almost play, like say ten or twelve instruments.

AW:

Yeah. So you served in the Army, Fourth Infantry. What time?

EP:

In the late forties.

AW:

Late forties?

EP:

Yes.

AW:

So were you posted overseas?

EP:

While I was positioned to go to Europe, and before they sent me, they transferred me to the post marshal's office, and I stayed there.

AW:

I see you went to the FBI academy?

EP:

Right.

AW:

My father-in-law—in fact, the reason I got interested in police work was—I was dating the woman to whom I'm still married, and her father was a police chief in Lubbock, and I was working at the grocery store, at about ten an hour, trying to make enough money to go to college. And he said, "Well, you know you can be a policeman and work at night." And this was the sixties, you know, who wanted to be a cop in the sixties? And I thought, "Oh no, I don't want to do that. But boy I need that money, and I can still go to school," so I went to work. It was absolutely the most interesting I've done. Of course, I was young, and I had a lot of energy—

EP:

It makes a big difference.

AW:

Yeah, it does make a lot of difference. Y'all are also athletes. I see lots of athletic endeavors for the both of you. Tsenre, you were also a musician.

TD:

I played the flute and the saxophone. I was very active in high school in band and in college, also.

AW:

My next life I'm going to play the flute because they're a lot easier to carry around than a guitar.

EP:

That's right.

TD:

My oldest daughter played the flute, and the younger one played the trumpet. Both were very good, and the younger one is very soft-spoken, but she played the trumpet. And Amber, who is very outspoken, played the flute. My husband played low brass, and things like that, so we all—that's how we met, really, was in band.

AW:

Can I get copies of this?

EP:

Those are yours.

AW:

Great. Okay. That saves me a lot of when where you born and that kind of thing, now I don't have to ask those things.

TD:

I can give you a more updated one on my side.

AW:

You were born on the twenty-sixth?

TD:

No, twenty-eighth.

AW:

Oh, I'm sorry. I had six-twenty-six.

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EP:

That was me. I was born in April 16, 1926.

AW:

Oh, I was just looking at this six-twenty-six.

TD:

That's probably the date that it was—

AW:

Oh, okay, because the twenty-sixth is my birthday, of June, so I was going to say, we're—Yeah. April sixteenth. Tsenre, what is your date of birth?

TD:

It's four twenty-eight, 1959.¹

AW:

Okay.

TD:

And I can get you a more updated copy. I don't think my dad has the more recent one, so—

AW:

Nineteen fifty-nine. Well, this allows us—again, since I have this great information, I don't—we spend a half hour, usually, saying where were you born and all that. This is great stuff. But tell me—how did you meet Betty Lou?

EP:

I graduated from high school in 1944, in May of '44, and I was eighteen years old in April. And I got a scholarship to Eastern New Mexico College, up in Taos. So I enrolled there at the school, and—of course, there was only about three—a little over three hundred in the whole college at the time. Now, there's about seven thousand. But the first class we had was freshman orientation, and of course, one of the things that we were excited to do was to meet all the faculty. So we met the faculty, and one of the faculty members was Anna Keener Wilton. And then I met Betty Lou a few days after that. Now, we did different things there at the college. And I was elected president of the freshman class, and Betty Lou's twin sister was on the council for the sophomore class, and we did things together, her twin sister and myself. Then Betty Lou and I dated a few times while we were in school. But then, she left the college there and came to

¹ April 28, 1959.

Albuquerque, and the reason why—Eastern New Mexico College was not accredited at the time—

AW:

Oh, really?

EP:

Of course, a year or two after that, it was accredited, and it became a university instead of a college. Her and her sister came out to Albuquerque and enrolled at UNM, and she graduated in the top of her class here at the university. Then Betty Lou from there went to New York and studied music, and from there she spent three months in Italy studying music, came back to New York, and then her twin sister was a schoolteacher in Santa Fe, and she was re-assigned to be the coordinator of all the music in the elementary schools.

AW:

The sister?

EP:

The sister.

AW:

And what was her sister's name?

EP:

Lou Ann.

AW:

Lou Ann?

EP:

And the reason Lou Ann and Betty Lou—her father's name was Lou—Louis, and her mother was Anna Elizabeth, see. So they coined the two together to make Betty Lou and Lou Ann.

AW:

So L-O-U A-N-N?

EP:

Two words.

AW:

And then B-E-T-T-Y?

EP:

Yeah.

AW:

L-O-U?

EP:

No, B-E-T-T-Y. Yes. L-O-U. Two words.

AW:

And so Lou Ann winds up being the coordinator of these programs—

EP:

Right. And then, Betty Lou came to Santa Fe. She left New York and came to Santa Fe—and of course, then we dated several times there in Santa Fe.

AW:

Were you in Santa Fe now?

EP:

Yes. I was in Santa Fe. See, I went to Santa Fe after I got discharged from the Army.

AW:

So you went from Eastern New Mexico into the Army?

EP:

Right.

AW:

And then wound up in Santa Fe.

EP:

Right.

AW:

And why did you pick Santa Fe?

EP:

I had an uncle that lived there, and his wife, which is my aunt by marriage—I was looking for a job. So I went to Santa Fe, and I couldn't find a job, and finally, I met the Director of Education for the state of New Mexico, and he said, "Do you have a teacher's certificate?" I said, "No. I attended school but I didn't get a teacher's certificate." He said, "I can get you an emergency teacher's certificate if you want to go teach school." And I said, "Where would this be?" He said, "In Quay County, in House." I don't know if you know where House is at?

AW:

I know. I've actually helped gather cows in Quay County before.

EP:

Oh, did you?

AW:

Yeah, I didn't gather very many, I wasn't very good at it.

EP:

So my uncle drove me down there to House and dropped me off, and I taught school there and coached basketball.

AW:

What year would this have been that you were at House?

EP:

In '77 and '78.

TD:

No, not '70.

EP:

Forty-seven and '48.

AW:

There wasn't a lot in House at '47, '48. That was pretty far out.

EP:

Yeah, pretty far out.

AW:

Didn't they have that big church building. Is that in House?

EP:

No.

AW:

That's the other town that's in Quay County, nearby. This really tiny town that's got this really big church.

EP:

Well anyway, the basketball team—the year before, they didn't do so good, and I built up a team there, and we played in the district tournament, and we played in the finals. And we could've won that game if I'd have just used a bit more finesse, but I didn't, I was too young. But we got beat by one point in the finals.

AW:

Wow. So it must have been a really good game to watch.

EP:

Yes. It was. We got a lot of write-ups on it. So then during the summer, I was supposed to go take some classes to work on my teacher's certificate. So I went to Santa Fe, and I enrolled in the College of Santa Fe. And I took some classes. Well, I had a contract to teach, and they were only paying fourteen hundred and seventy-five dollars a year, which was not very much.

AW:

Yeah, even in '47.

EP:

So I got a job while I was going to school there at the College of Santa Fe, part-time job selling cars. And I could make more in a weekend than I could there in a whole month teaching school. So when it came time to go back, I resigned and stayed in Santa Fe. So that's how I worked myself up and got into the automobile business.

AW:

Tell me: you grew up in Dawson.

EP:

Right.

AW:

What did your parents do in Dawson?

EP:

My grandfather on my dad's side was a foreman on the coal cutlets. He had about—oh, twenty-five men working under him, which they made coke. And my grandfather on my mother's side worked at the tippie, which was a place they shipped the coal out of the mines. And they washed it and picked the coal, the bone out, they called it. That was the rock, you know, to have pure coal.

AW:

Right. And they did that by hand, they didn't have a machine?

EP:

No, they did that by hand. They had a conveyer—

AW:

So you stood on that and got rid of the—

EP:

Got rid of the rock.

AW:

It sounds like chopping cotton.

EP:

That's right. And then my dad, he was what they call a coal boy. Every morning, at four o'clock in the morning, he had a certain number of miners that he had to go wake up to go ready to work in the mine, and that's why they called him a coal boy. So that was his job. And then in 1913, the coal company shut down. They stopped making coal. So my grandfather and grandmother on my dad's side, they took my dad and an uncle—my dad was—let's see, he would have been twelve years old, and my uncle would've been four years old, and he took them back to Italy.

AW:

What part of Italy had they come—had the—had your great-grand—or your grandparents come over from Italy?

EP:

Yes.

AW:

What part?

EP:

In the northeast of Rome, which was almost in the Adriatic Sea. Pacentro, I don't know if you know that name.

AW:

No, but that gives me an idea of the part of the country. So they went back to Rome. I mean, back to—to Italy.

EP:

And—of course, my grandfather got a job there, and my dad went to school there for six months. And then they decided that that wasn't for him, he wanted to come back to the United States, my grandfather, so that's when they came back to the United States. And that's when they bought the farm there in Maxwell.

AW:

Okay, yeah. And so he farmed.

EP:

He farmed, yes.

AW:

And while you were growing up, it was farming that you grew up with.

EP:

Right.

AW:

What did you—what did the family raise there? What kind of farming was that?

EP:

Well, they raised alfalfa, they raised pinto beans, they raised wheat, oats, corn—

AW:

And all that was dry land, I would guess, right?

EP:

No, no, they had irrigation.

AW:

Did they? What was the irrigation? How did they do that?

EP:

Vermejo Conservancy District.

AW:

So it was ditch water?

EP:

Ditch water, yes. They had several lakes there, storage lakes—you know, in that part of the country. Of course, then they were allowed so much water, and they irrigated the crops. And that's where I—I used to—well, we worked hard, my older brother and myself, we worked hard as kids, you know. We were playing basketball, for instance, and the game was to start at seven o'clock in the evening, in the summertime it was still daylight, we'd get off work, and my mother would have some sandwiches ready for us to eat. We'd grab the sack lunch of sandwiches, and we'd eat them running on the way to town. We lived three miles to town. We got there and we took a shower in gym before we played basketball.

AW:

So you could play basketball.

EP:

Yeah.

AW:

When you were ditch-watering, did you have siphon tubes or did you cut a—

EP:

Canvas. Canvas tanks.

AW:

Yeah. That's a lot of work, too, just keeping the water moving—

EP:

Yeah. When we'd water, we'd water day and night. I'd have a certain area I'd water, my dad had a certain area, my brother'd have a certain area. And I know I had to set my canvas to irrigate, and I knew exactly where it would run out at the end, so I'd go over there and lay down in the field and when that water got there, it would wet me and wake me up. This was at night. And then I would go and change the water, see.

AW:

That's a great methodology.

EP:

Quite a deal.

AW:

So you—were you glad to get off the farm?

EP:

Well, yes. You know, it was no way to make a decent-type living, you know, you have to work hard.

AW:

Well and plus, was your father still alive when you got out of—

EP:

Yes. Oh, yes.

AW:

So, unless you had more farmland, you sure couldn't make the same living for—

EP:

So—when I left and went to college, then my sister was born, who lives here. She's sixteen-and-a-half years older—younger—than I am. My dad sold that place to the Wildlife—

AW:

To the refuge?

EP:

Refuge, yes. And they tore all the buildings down and made a wildlife refuge out of it. So my father bought another farm and ranch in Colfax, in the Vermejo River. They moved over there. I never did live there because I was gone. But it's still in existence. In fact, a member of the family owns it now, and he's raising Brahma bulls. Bucking Brahma bulls.

AW:

Really? For the rodeo circuit.

EP:

Yeah. And we stopped by there, Tsenre and I, Tsenre's husband and my sister this summer.

AW:

It's beautiful country.

EP:

Yes.

AW:

I've got a good friend that's a wrangler in Philmont.

EP:

Okay.

AW:

Ron Taylor, he's a musician also. I go to visit him from time to time.

EP:

Yeah. There was a student friend of mine—classmate—that ended up being head of the Philmont Ranch there. Bill Littrel, I don't know if that name sounds—

AW:

No, I don't know that much about—I mainly know Ron and a couple of other fellows that used to work at the museum there.

EP:

That's quite a place. That headquarters building that Waite Phillips built, you know.

AW:

Yeah, and the history of the people who have come through there is pretty amazing.

EP:

That's right. Yeah, my older brother, he was superintendent of the schools there in Cimarron. He had Cimarron, Eagle Nest, Angel Fire and Vermejo Park. And in the summertime, he would go as—be a registrar for the Boy Scouts at Philmont Ranch.

AW:

Yeah, that's great country to live in. And what was your brother's name?

EP:

Joe.

AW:

Joe? And your sister?

EP:

Diana.

AW:

Diana. Is Diana still alive?

EP:

Yes.

AW:

And what about Joe?

EP:

Joe has passed away in—passed away in—

TD:

Some time ago.

EP:

Two thousand—in '98.

AW:

Ninety-eight? Yeah, that has been a while. What was—what was Dawson like when you were growing up? I know you when you were talking about your grandfather being over the first time, the population there in Colfax County, when the mines were going, was really big.

EP:

Dawson had a population of nine thousand people, and it was the biggest city in New Mexico at the time.

AW:

Wow.

EP:

And there was—they called them coal camps. It was about eight coal mines or ten that they worked, and each one of these coal camps, they tried to put—see, the Phelps Dodge [Corporation] owed all the buildings, all the houses, everything. And they put them in like, one

place where there'd be nothing but Greeks. Another place that'd be nothing but Italians. Another place that'd be nothing but Spanish people. Another place that would be English people. Another place that would be colored people. And the colored people, they'd put them way up in the canyon, and they called it Coon Town. They had the best place of the bunch.

AW:

Yeah, because they were way up. So were there lots of fights when these different—

EP:

Oh, yeah, oh yeah.

AW:

I can imagine.

EP:

They used to play baseball among the—

AW:

--camps?

EP:

Yeah, camps.

AW:

That's interesting. So growing up there was quite a different thing than it would be growing up in that area today.

EP:

Oh yeah, completely different. Completely different. Yeah.

AW:

Interesting. Very interesting. So you met—you're back in Santa Fe selling cars, and you reconnect with Betty Lou?

EP:

Right.

AW:

And so that would've been '49, '48?

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EP:

No, no. In the fifties. Early fifties. See, I was there—I moved there in '48, and Betty Lou didn't come until '53.

AW:

And you got married in '54, is that right?

EP:

We got married in '54.

AW:

Santa Fe was a different place in '54, too.

EP:

Oh, completely. Santa Fe was the population was about fourteen thousand. And you got that—after you lived there a while, you got to know everyone in town. Now, what's happened to Santa Fe is the people from California and from back east have just come in and congregated there, and it's a different town altogether.

AW:

Yeah. I often had—in my mind I imagine that today's Taos is a lot more like what Santa Fe was.

EP:

Oh, yeah. Let me show you something here. I'll bring it in.

AW:

Okay, thank you. [To TD] So you grew up in Santa Fe.

TD:

I did, I did. I was born in Santa Fe and graduated there, went to Santa Fe High, then went to UNM², and then after I graduated I came back to Santa Fe and I worked for my dad for a while. I was very interested—I had a business education degree. There were no jobs for teachers anywhere and I decided—and I had traveled a lot in the band, because our high school band was—we had a really good director, and went to several festivals, and we won many times. So we were invited to be part of a tour every other year in Europe, so I'd been to Europe several times by then. And I decided I really liked traveling, so I went to travel school and became a travel agent, went back to Santa Fe as a travel agent for several years.

AW:

² University of New Mexico.

So as a travel agent—I always wonder about that. People who like travel become travel agents, but don't you sit in an office somewhere and make plans for other people?

TD:

Yes, you do.

AW:

So how do you get to travel?

TD:

Well, the big thing is we used to get free tickets from all the airlines, and we had more than we could use, you know on weekends.

EP:

All right, this is the first time I was at Eastern New Mexico College, and that's '45, when the school year was up. There's an article that Anna Keener wrote there. She asked me to model for her art class.

AW:

Drawing? Yeah? This was called—

EP:

Silver Pack³.

AW:

You've got lots of signatures. I guess—

EP:

Well, you've got to know everyone in—

AW:

—because it's such a small school, yeah. Boy, lots of different towns represented.

TD:

I have his book on Dawson, I should have brought it. Daddy, you want me to go get it?

EP:

Oh, no, I don't that's necessary unless he needs it later, we can get it.

³ *Silver Pack* is the name of Eastern New Mexico University's yearbook.

AW:

And several people from Taiban. You know, I drive through Taiban all the time.

TD:

And it's such a small little itty-bitty place.

AW:

It's hard to imagine anybody—well it doesn't look like anybody's there.

TD:

We have some friends that have a ranch out in that area. In fact, she's a volunteer fireman in Taiban.

AW:

Yeah, but you do have to slow down. You know, I don't think—you can look at yearbooks as far back as you want, and they really are still the same.

TD:

They really are.

AW:

It's just—it's amazing how that has continued. This is great. And it's such a nice picture of what life was like in a particular time and place. Well, when you were growing up, Tsenre, in Santa Fe—I mean, it's even changed a lot since then, hasn't it?

TD:

Oh, dramatically. It's not the same place at all. Not at all. I'm sure it was much different when my dad first went there, and my mother and grandmother went back. But it was completely different than it is now. I remember as a little girl growing up and, you know, knowing a lot of people around town, we were all—there's more people that live in Albuquerque that are my friends that I grew up with than live in Santa Fe still. And it's just so different. I mean, the whole climate, the whole culture has changed. It's just not at all what it used to be.

AW:

Yeah, I go there a lot and I like it, but it's—you know, it's—and I never do get to know it when I was young. I didn't go there until I was much older, spend any kind of time. So I regret not having gotten to see what that Santa Fe was like.

TD:

It was so different. It was such a wonderful small town to be from—

EP:

This is not the one I was wanting.

TD:

So many really wonderful areas and people, and you got to—it was a very close-knit community, very supportive community, and now it's just—I don't miss it at all. I really don't.

AW:

No, I can imagine.

TD:

It's not at all what I remember growing up.

AW:

In fact, I'm going to tell you: I stay at a hotel because it's near Whole Foods and that's just a practical issue, you know, if you don't feel like going out and spending a whole lot of money, you can go off next door and get a bowl of soup, but the atmosphere in that store is awful.

TD:

Really?

AW:

Well, there are like old rich people from other places, and they drive their cars like they're bulldozers. It's not—and I'm around the people who are Santa Feans, and they're not like that. And I go to Taos, and they're not like that there, and they're not like that in my hometown.

TD:

Well, we're westerners. We like space around us. You go to the easterners that are right up behind you, you know bumping you all the time, that's a lot of it.

AW:

I think you're right. And no offense to them, of course—

TD:

No. It's just a different lifestyle.

AW:

Well, so, how long did you stay in the travel business?

TD:

Well, I was actually a travel agent for about sixteen years.

AW:

That's a long time. Because that's a pretty tough business.

TD:

It used to be, and it really is non-existent anymore.

AW:

Yes, because you've got—

TD:

Everybody can use the Internet—once the Internet became so popular—it was a lot of fun, because I got to—I really enjoyed putting together the pieces of the puzzle, living in Santa Fe, of course, we had some really great clients. I had clients that would fly the Concord over, take the Orient Express and we'd book things, and then they'd take the QE2⁴ back, so—and I worked at a very well-established travel agency, Small World Travel—

AW:

That would've been fun to—

TD:

It was fun. Yeah.

AW:

Just planning somebody to take the Orient Express—

TD:

Oh yeah. It was great fun. Then when Mike and I decided to get married, I knew that we'd have to leave, but I went to Denver. I worked for Continental for one summer, but then I managed a travel agency in downtown Denver for several years before we had kids. And then when we had kids, I moved out closer to—when we were going to start a family, I moved up closer to where we lived, and then eventually I was independent, and I was one of the first ones that had a link where I could do all the reservations over the computer and I just went into the office when I had to write my tickets.

AW:

Oh, so you could do that from home?

TD:

So I did it from home and just took the babies with me.

AW:

That's sort of an advanced thing for the time. That would have been what? In the mid-eighties?

TD:

It was in the—I would say in the mid-to-late eighties. Because our daughters were born in '89 and then '92—

AW:

I was using travel agents in those years. For—after—I told you I moved back to Texas and then the inflation hit and brokers did us so bad, so I wound up becoming a vice-president for this investment banking firm out of New York.

TD:

Oh, wow.

AW:

Yeah, but you know, they give out vice-president titles like banks do. I had a—I had a region that I traveled, but I was in the air four or five days a week. In those days, you couldn't do that on the computer, and you could hardly do it over the phone. You really had to have a travel agent, because they knew what to do and where—how to get the car reserved for you. I lived by that.

TD:

I had a lot of business clients that were there, and some of them who had their own companies and some who worked for big companies. In fact, we did the travel for Philip Anschutz and his corporation for years. I mean, some of those—some of my clients had my home phone and they called me all hours of the day or night if they were stuck somewhere—you know, expect me to fix it.

AW:

No, I did the same thing, because if you're in a Cleveland airport at two in the morning and you don't want to be there—

TD:

Right. It was fun business though.

EP:

This was—this was activities associated in '93 and '94. But they had the—an article in here about the tournament in '44.

AW:

Yeah. Nineteen forty-four all-state tournament team. Ernest Pompeo, Maxwell. That's great. How neat.

EP:

And then this article's here—we had a deal there in—at the end of the season, we played the women teachers versus the Taos-an teachers, and the Pompeo boys versus the rest of the squad.

AW:

Oh, really? Now, where was this?

EP:

In Maxwell.

AW:

In Maxwell?

EP:

There were so many people that wandered in the gym that they couldn't even get them all in.

AW:

Really? There were just two of you, right?

EP:

No, there was seven of us.

AW:

Oh.

TD:

He has two other brothers—

EP:

—but there was seven cousins.

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AW:

So, there were a lot of Pompeo boys. You could put a whole team on the court.

EP:

That's right. Which we did, that's why this article came out here in this thing, too. I'll find it there for you. But then, you see, that's when I played at ENMC⁵—let's see.

AW:

That's great. What a great photo, too.

EP:

This is the state tournament here, see, in '44.

AW:

Where you had the one-point game?

EP:

Yeah, and they went ahead and—and it was talking about how many Pompeos played on the team and so forth, you know. You don't want to read all that, but anyway, that's one of—but anyway, we played and we beat the rest of the squad so bad that it was like eighty-five to thirty—something like that. And they wouldn't let us play anymore the following years. Because they said there were too many hard feelings involved the people in there.

AW:

Yeah, that's pretty funny. Well, when you—after you and Betty Lou got married, you're in the automobile business and you stay in that business, and she taught?

EP:

She was teaching school. She taught art in junior highs. Two different junior highs.

AW:

And your mother-in-law, Anna, was she back in Santa Fe by this time?

EP:

No, no. She was still in—

AW:

Portales?

⁵ Eastern New Mexico College.

EP:

Portales, and then she retired and moved to Santa Fe, and then she moved in with Betty Lou and I.

AW:

Yeah. When did she move back to Santa Fe or moved to Santa Fe?

EP:

Let's see, this would've been in '54.

AW:

So this is a sort of an odd question, but when you have someone in your family that's really good at something, you don't always recognize it.

EP:

That's true.

AW:

Did you realize that your mother-in-law was this really phenomenal painter?

EP:

Well yes I did, and I'll tell you why I did, it's because I saw some of the work she did while I was at student at Eastern New Mexico College. And then, when she came to Santa Fe, I had to take her out on these bases where she would sketch—

AW:

Oh yeah, what you were telling me about when we were looking through the house, that you would take a book with you—

EP:

Right. On several occasions, I took her to different places. Sometimes Betty Lou would go with us, a lot of times she wouldn't. I'd go by myself.

AW:

That sounds like fun to me.

EP:

It was. It was.

AW:

And you, of course, knew the area.

EP:

Oh, yes. Yes.

AW:

Because Anna had grown up in Texas, had she not?

EP:

Dalhart.

AW:

Dalhart. Yeah.

EP:

And then she went to school in Lindsborg.

AW:

Yeah, Kansas, where they have the great art museum.

EP:

No—

TD:

Mm-hm.

AW:

Lindsborg, Kansas.

EP:

Yeah, yeah.

AW:

They have a great museum there.

EP:

And that's when Sandzén⁶ was the art instructor there, and my mother-in-law studied under him and then assisted him. In fact, she was given an award—I forget the year, but I could look it up, but this was about 1958 or '59, somewhere in there. You were born in—

TD:

Fifty-nine.

EP:

Yeah, this would've been in '59, because my wife was pregnant at the time, and we drove her to Lindsborg, where she received this honor. And they recognized her as one of the greatest women students that ever attended Lindsborg, which she has the plaque—I have the plaque in there. And then they had a—oh, there was a man who got the men's award, that was a great Swedish country, you know.

AW:

Yeah, yeah. Hence—hence the name.

EP:

Yeah. And one time, we drove her there, and she had a friend that lived there in Lindsborg, and we left her there for a month. We came back, and when it was time to pick her up, we drove back up there and got her.

AW:

Yeah. When she was in Dalhart, what did her family do?

EP:

He was an engineer on the railroad. In fact, he was to take these trains all over. They built that bridge there at Logan, railroad bridge and he—

AW:

Over the Rio.

EP:

Yeah. And he drove the first train over that bridge.

AW:

⁶ Birger Sandzén.

Really? That's a pretty spectacular bridge, even by today's standards. I drive by—when I can, I like to go through there, through Mosquero and Roy, it's a beautiful drive.

EP:

He and his wife, which was Betty Lou's grandmother and grandfather, they're both buried at the cemetery in Dalhart.

AW:

With such great ranching country, I was interested is whether they were in ranching or something affiliated. The railroad too, of course was very, very important. Interesting. One the things that I was curious about in looking at the collection of materials that we have now, is if there are more materials about you or Betty Lou or Anna Keener Wilton that we need to add to that or could add to it, things that we could scan or copy—

EP:

Well, yeah, there's a lot of things. I'd have to hunt—dig them out, though--

AW:

Well, if over the next however—whatever time that's convenient for you, if you'll let me know—as I said, I get up through this country pretty often, and I'd be able to come by and pick them up. If there are things that we can digitize—scan and return, we would be glad to do that, too.

TD:

That's funny. We could probably help you with that. My husband and I own Document Imaging of the Southwest. You could scan them, or I could scan them for you

AW:

Six hundred DPI⁷. As long as it's that way, we're good.

TD:

I can do that.

EP:

When my mother-in-law, Anna Keener, graduated from high school, her parents gave her this piano right here as a graduation gift. They thought she would become a great musician, you know, play the piano. And she wasn't interested in playing the piano. She was interested in painting. So the piano sat idle and she pursued her work in the arts industry, see.

AW:

⁷ Dots per inch, a measure of spatial printing or video dot density.

What did Betty Lou's sister do? Was she also a teacher?

EP:

Yeah, she was coordinator of music in the elementary schools. Right.

AW:

That's right. She did that for her—

EP:

Until she retired. Betty Lou didn't retire in teaching because after we were married, I made her quit teaching and stay at home and take care of Tsenre, my mother-in-law, myself, and I did the work.

AW:

Yeah. Interesting.

EP:

Betty Lou and I used to make backdrops and everything for Lou Ann when she'd give a music program in her schools, you know. I constructed in such a way that we could tear it apart and then put it together in a hurry, see, put it on the stage as a backdrop for her choir in front of us.

AW:

Do you have many photos from those years in Santa Fe or even back further, from Maxwell and Dawson?

EP:

Yeah.

AW:

You know, those are things we would really like to get copies of.

EP:

Well, I've got a book— Tsenre has it now.

TD:

I'd be happy to go get it if you want to see it.

AW:

Well, you don't have to get it now, but I mean, the things that we would—are they captioned so you know when and where—even better.

TD:

There's some great pictures of it, of my dad even in that book, because it was written about Dawson in the coal mines, when they finally closed down and what life was like there.

AW:

Oh, I see what you're talking about. You're talking about a—

TD:

It's a published book. It's out of print now, you can't get any more copies of it, but we could reproduce certain pictures, especially ones with my dad in it.

AW:

Yeah. That's a little more difficult—well, maybe if it's out of print we won't have trouble with copyright issues. I was wondering if you had just photos of your own. Those things would be really good, and I know that you were all interested in preserving the history, and if we could wind up getting those copies—and with that, we could sit down and go through them and provide the captions for when and where they were, who's in the photo.

EP:

Yeah, I can get a lot of that—a lot of those photos and so forth together.

AW:

Do you have photos of you at work in your automotive business or Betty Lou when she was teaching or Anna Keener when she's painting, those kinds of—

TD:

There's folder we have of those.

EP:

Oh yeah, yeah.

AW:

That's really good stuff, too. And I know you understand this, but I have to give this talk anyway, about why we have the archive, and that's to think about not the page one news, but what's on page two. How—a hundred and fifty years from now, people are still going to be studying painters like Anna Keener, and to have the information about how she went about doing her work, like you were just telling me about the glass transfer pieces and working with sand and those kinds of things—the more documentation we have of those little details, the better it is.

TD:

I remember—well, she lived with us and I grew up around my grandmother, you know, so—but I remember the presses that she had, the tables and all the easels. It was great fun to go in and spend time with her.

AW:

That must have been really cool for you.

TD:

It was.

AW:

Having Grandma so handy.

TD:

And she was so—she had such a sense of humor, such a personality. She was one that loved to make faces and chase you down the hall—I mean, she was hilarious. She had—

AW:

You were an only child?

TD:

Yes.

AW:

Okay, so you got all the attention.

TD:

I did. (laughs)

AW:

Do you feel guilty about that?

TD:

No, I don't feel guilty.

EP:

To tell you what type of person she was—when I decided that Betty Lou and I were going to be married and agreed to it, I went to my mother-in-law and I says, “I need your blessing and your permission to marry Betty Lou.” She says, “Well, let me tell you one thing. I wouldn’t marry her.”

AW:

So did that give you pause? Did you reconsider?

EP:

No, not really, no. But she was the type that regardless of me or Betty Lou, she stood up for whoever was right.

AW:

Really?

EP:

Which most mothers-in-law, they [stand] up for their child before they will anybody else. She was not that way.

AW:

How interesting. So I guess it was—it was not a problem having your mother-in-law live with you?

EP:

Oh, no. Oh, no. Oh, no.

AW:

Yeah. That’s really great.

EP:

No. We had a big enough house for her it didn’t—we got along fine.

AW:

Well, you moved up fairly rapidly in the car business.

EP:

Yes.

AW:

Was part of that Santa Fe growing some—I mean, it looks to me like the car business is a tricky business.

EP:

It is. It is more so today than it was then.

AW:

What's different today then?

EP:

Today, you don't have any real loyal customers like you had then.

AW:

Yeah, I do remember that you were a Chevrolet person or a Ford person or a Chrysler person. You didn't deviate much from—

EP:

Yeah. But you know, I used to have customers that—for instance, I sold them a car like in 1952, for instance. And they would have the paperwork where I sold them the car, and it didn't require a lot of paperwork like it does today. You had a little tablet about that wide and about that long, and triplet copies, you'd put the name and address and the model they were buying and the price and how much down and how much they were going to finance and so forth. And you'd keep one copy, the main copy, give them a copy and a copy you'd put with the contract that you sold it with, you see.

AW:

That seems more paperwork than that today for an oil change.

TD:

Yeah, that's true.

EP:

People would bring that in ten years later and say, "You sold me this car in 1952. I'd like to buy another car from you."

AW:

So once you built a customer, you had a—

EP:

You had them for a long time.

AW:

That's right. So then you—you weren't always having to scrap for—

EP:

That's right.

AW:

It's very different. It's too bad it's not like that today.

EP:

To give you an example, there was a gentleman by the name of Thornton that lived in Lamy, he had a ranch up there in Lamy, and he was retired, but he still operated that ranch. When he'd call me on the phone and he says, "Ernest, can you fix me up with a new Jeep? I'm ready for a new Jeep." I said, "Mr. Thornton, I sure can. What color do you want, or what equipment do you want? He said, "No, you know what I want, you just get it and you call me when you're ready and I'll come and get it." See, that's the way it worked.

AW:

Yeah, well I would like to be a consumer like that today—the prospect of having to buy a car is daunting.

TD:

Oh it's awful. My dad was very well-respected in the business, especially with Nissan, what used to be Datsun and now Nissan, he was on an international board because of his success all throughout the Rocky Mountains and as a top-selling dealer and just his expertise.

AW:

They have quite a record—an enviable record, I'd say. First of all, changing their name, that's hard to do for a product.

EP:

From Datsun to Nissan.

AW:

Was that a little scary, taking on a line, a Japanese line that wasn't a Honda or a Toyota?

EP:

No, not really, not really, because that was in 1965. And they had this little sedan, a four-door sedan and a station wagon, and then a little pick-up. And the cost on them was relatively small, you know, and you had a pretty good margin of profit. They'd only allow you so many of them,

because they were short of merchandise, you know, in the beginning. And of course, you could make some money with their products.

AW:

But didn't you have to have an inventory of parts and things?

EP:

Oh, yes, but it was very small.

AW:

Yeah, so it wasn't like you had a—like you had a huge capital outlay that you—

EP:

No. Now, eventually, yes. Eventually, I had about a quarter of a million dollars' worth of parts, but to start with, if you had two thousand dollars' worth, you could cover the whole line, see.

AW:

In those years, like a parts inventory, was that something that was financed by the manufacturer, or did you have to do that?

EP:

We had to do that. You wanted—

AW:

That's a big deal. That's a big deal.

EP:

Yeah, you owned it. Yes.

AW:

So that would've meant that you worked a lot with banks.

EP:

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. That's right.

AW:

Both for yourself and your customers, because you probably didn't have like General Motors, an acceptance kind of thing.

EP:

No, no. It was mainly the banks.

AW:

Very interesting. When you were on this board, what kinds of things did you get to do? Talk about what your customers wanted in the way of automobiles—

EP:

Yeah, that's what we did. Give them some ideas, what some of the changes should be made and what shouldn't—a lot of them took root, you know. They listened to us, you know.

AW:

What was—you know, you always hear about the management style in Toyota and Honda, you hear a lot about that, but not so much about Nissan. What was it like working with the Japanese manufacturers as they would be different from the Jeep. Now, in those years, was Jeep owned by Chrysler or was it—

EP:

Jeep was owned by—first it was Willys-Overland.

AW:

And then American Motors.

EP:

No. And then Kaiser. Henry J. Kaiser. He bought the Jeep manufacturing plant—of course, he was in the steel business, you know.

AW:

Kaiser Steel, yeah.

EP:

And then it was American Motors.

AW:

Yeah, we had people on our block when I was growing up in Lubbock, one of them had a Henry J., and another one had a Nash; it was a big car. Yeah a lot of chrome I remember on the dashboard. So was there a different in working with the Japanese?

EP:

The Japanese were real easy to get along with. They really were. They wanted the dealers. They would go over backward to help you. In other words, if you had a service problem, for instance, they would send a district service manager to you to help you solve the problems.

AW:

That's really good. That's interesting to hear.

EP:

Yeah. They were really, really good to work with.

AW:

When did you retire from the automobile business?

EP:

In '84. These people came to me, and they said, "We want to buy your business." And I said, "It's not for sale." They said, "Well, it will be if we make an offer," And I said, "Well, make me an offer." So about three days later, they came in and made me an offer in writing, and I said, "No, that won't do it. That won't do it at all." They said, "Well, what would it take?" And I told them what it would take, and they said, "We'll buy it." And that was the people that owned the Western Banks, I don't know if you knew about the Western Banks in those days.

AW:

No.

EP:

They operated in New Mexico, parts of Arizona, southern Colorado, and parts of West Texas. And that was the Western Banks.

AW:

And they wanted to be in the car business?

EP:

They wanted in the car business. They had already bought a dealership in Denver, they had one that they bought in Las Cruces, I think, and then they wanted my dealership, and then they wanted to buy two others in different places. Then there was poor management on their part, they hired some people to run the banks for them, and they went bankrupt.

AW:

So what happened to the car business that had been yours?

EP:

The car business, they were forced to sell out, and they sold out—they had to sell out.

AW:

So the business went away, then, somebody didn't just come in and buy the business, they liquidated.

TD:

Well, actually—because my dad kept the building and sold the business, and didn't you get it back that time?

EP:

Yeah. Yeah.

TD:

It came back to you that time.

AW:

It was at Cordova and Cerrillos?

TD:

No, this was after he had built the building at Saint Michael's Drive.

EP:

Saint Michael's Drive.

AW:

Oh, Saint Michael's drive. Still, dirt in Santa Fe is worth a lot of money.

TD:

And he got it back once, and then sold it again.

EP:

Then I sold it again.

AW:

And—when we were walking through the house—this beautiful house, looking at all the great art and views and so forth—you were talking about why you moved here, and it was for your daughter and their family. You'd been here, you said—

EP:

Moved here June 6, 2000.

AW:

Two-thousand. That's a long time.

EP:

Thirteen years ago.

AW:

And I'll say for the tape recorder, this house looks brand-new. It's so clean and neat and organized. It's pretty amazing. Well, what have I not—we've been kind of all over the map because there's so many interesting stories here—what should I have asked about that I haven't so far?

EP:

Well, I don't know.

AW:

Well, let's leave it at that for today, and I would ask that if you'd think about some materials that we could add to the collection that we already have, because we have a lot of lives here that are very interesting. And of course, Anna Keener is a focal point for our collection because of her work. But the stories of you and Maxwell, Tsenre, Betty Lou, and the whole thing, those are very interesting, and those things are supportive to us, it paints a picture of life in this part of the world, and the things that happened and how you developed. So the kinds of materials that you would have that we could add, especially since you and your husband have this goldmine for us of digital imaging—because it—you know—I don't—we just don't mail things if we can avoid it, because once you lose it, it's gone. And I even worry a little bit about carrying it back and forth in the car, you know, in the van. So if we could get some copies, especially of old family photographs, and then I would love to come back up if we need to and sit down and go through those photographs and add the captions to them, who is this, when was it and that kind of thing. And then you were showing me some of these things, like the article in that championship publication that talked about your teams and the Pompeo boys, those are great things. That's just great things, and the photo of you at Eastern New Mexico—terrific, terrific stuff.

EP:

Sure, I can get a lot of that stuff together.

AW:

Great. I will give you each a card. It's got my cell phone on it, and I am happy for you to call my cell at any time, because if I don't feel like answering, I don't. And it takes a message. And it's got my e-mail address—

TD:

Wonderful.

AW:

I can answer any kind of questions, and would love to do whatever we can. You have a huge collection of Anna Keener's art, and you could—gosh, you could almost build a gallery. Well, you do have a gallery. This house is a pretty good gallery. And I mentioned when we were walking around, you know, there's probably a nice book in that—in the artwork that you have, much less what the things that you can borrow back from collections. I would think there are things out there that you would know, you know, things that show—gosh, the different styles that I saw just today were—and I wasn't familiar with that. I'd seen some of the—

TD:

The New Mexico landscapes?

AW:

The Taos school sort of material, which is stunning, but then there are all these other things, and those lithographs of her pencil work, those are really nice. That's one of the things I like best, I think.

TD:

Really?

AW:

Well, of course, everybody loves big New Mexico skies.

EP:

She did a block printing, too.

AW:

Really?

EP:

You know, she would—

AW:

Did we see any of those?

EP:

They're in those files there. She would get a piece of linoleum, you know, that printers used, you know that—and she would carve whatever she wanted to in those linoleum blocks and then print them.

TD:

And she ran her own press. I can remember that hand-crank press that she would run.

AW:

And this was in your home in Santa Fe?

TD:

She had a big studio that was off on the end of the house.

AW:

Do you have photos of that studio?

TD:

I'm sure we do.

AW:

And especially of her working in it—

TD:

Oh, yeah.

AW:

Oh, that would be just—that would be great stuff to go with the collection.

TD:

I know that there's several of her with—that were formally taken, but we have some, you know, just family pictures.

AW:

Well, we'd like them both but the family pictures would be really good, especially showing her working. Everybody says books are on the way out, everything's digital, but that's not true,

especially if they're beautiful images. I would think that there's a lot to be said about her role in art in this part of the world that could be done well in a book.

TD:

I think that would be great, myself.

EP:

We'll get a bunch of stuff together, then sometime when you're back up this way, you can stop and then some if you want it, fine, some if you don't, leave it.

AW:

Yeah, if you would—just when you kind of have some things together, if you would drop me an e-mail note or give me a call, then I'll plan a trip, because I have—you know, it's expensive to travel in time and money. Like this week, this is the third interview I've done and I'm also attending a conference in Quivira, a coalition conference. So I like to get things done when I'm on the road, and I can—if I know that you have some things ready for us to discuss or look at, then I can plan a trip around that. I'd be—

TD:

That'd be great.

AW:

And it's only five hours to Lubbock from here.

TD:

I'd be curious, even, I don't know what's in the collection. I know the majority of the archive—

AW:

Have you been?

TD:

I haven't been there.

AW:

Do you ever get that direction?

TD:

Oh, we could definitely come, that's no problem.

AW:

If you will let me know when that would be good, we'll make sure that you get a look at it. Now, we do have lists of things that we can provide for you, but they're rather sterile, you know. Plus, I think you would really like to see the environment in which the collection is kept, and how people use it, and what the value of that would be.

TD:

I would love to see that; I really would.

AW:

We'd love to have you come down, we'd show you around.

TD:

Well, that would be good. We might have to plan that trip, that would be fun to do.

EP:

Oh, yes.

AW:

Unless there's a blizzard on [Interstate] 40, it is an easy trip.

TD:

Oh, it's a piece of cake. I know it's not far.

AW:

It's just an easy trip. And even then, blizzards on 40 don't last that long.

TD:

That's true. That's true.

AW:

Yeah. Good. All right. Well, thank you so much for showing me around and welcoming me to this house.

EP:

You're quite welcome, and anytime.

AW:

Well, thanks. On that happy note, I'm going to say—I'll stop this tape.

End of interview.



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