

**Oral History Interview of
Cranston Reid**

**Interviewed by: Daniel Sanchez
October 8, 2015
Lubbock, Texas**

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Transcript Overview:

This interview features Cranston Reid. Reid discusses his background in electrical engineering, his work as a professional photographer, his training as a pilot, and his work in storm chasing.

Length of Interview: 01:11:15

Subject	Transcript Page	Time Stamp
Background and family	5	00:00:00
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Keywords

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Cranston Reid (CR):

While I'm thinking about it, I'm going to turn this stuff off because I—

Daniel Sanchez (DS):

What's the day—it's raining from here to Dallas.

CR:

All the way?

DS:

Basically, yeah.

CR:

I didn't think it got that far east yet, okay.

DS:

Yeah, in fact they had—I restarted with this—today's date is October the 8, 2015. My name is Daniel Sanchez, and I'm here with Cranston Reid at his studio here in Lubbock, Texas.

Cranston, first of all, thank you for agreeing to sit down for this interview—

CR:

Oh, you're welcome.

DS:

And could be please state your complete legal name.

CR:

Cranston Reid, C-r-a-n-s-t-o-n R-e-i-d

DS:

Okay, and when and where you born?

CR:

I was born in Reno, Nevada, February 6, 1951.

DS:

How about your parents, start with your dad, give us his name and information.

CR:

Earl Cranston Reid, and he was born in Yukon, Oklahoma, and what else did you—

DS:

Oh, his date of birth

CR:

1912, I believe, I don't recall the exact date.

DS:

Okay

CR:

Yeah I do, it's January twenty-first, yeah I do [laugh].

DS:

And what was his occupation?

CR:

Airforce, he retired as a colonel

DS:

Wow

CR:

But he built runways on the Pacific Islands during the war

DS:

Did he ever tell you about that?

CR:

Didn't ever tell me much about it, didn't ever tell me much about it. I just know that he did civil engineering and he worked on the dams, some of the big southwest dams, he did some of that, but don't know much about him.

DS:

Did the family follow him along everywhere he went?

CR:

We had no choice [laugh]. Yeah, we had no choice, and so lived a few different places, in Reno and then in California and then, let's see, Guantanamo Bay at the Naval Air Station in Cuba, then Elk City, Oklahoma, and then Lubbock. Not too many—I guess in between, from after Gitmo,

went to Bossier City where he was at Barksdale Air Base, so lived there some then over to Oklahoma, Elk City, then to Lubbock [laugh].

DS:

Okay, and how about your mom, what's her name?

CR:

Mary Francis Reid.

DS:

And where was she born?

CR:

I believe she was born in Springdale, Arkansas, pretty sure, and 1921 for her.

DS:

Okay and what was her occupation?

CR:

Housewife and during the war she was one of the clerks at one of the relocation centers in Arkansas and then housewife from then on out

DS:

Did she ever talk about that time, transitioning from working and back?

CR:

Never did, never did. I think they were happy to put that stuff behind them and go on with things that mattered more. But neither of them discussed it very much.

DS:

And that's the way it is with a lot of people that were affected by it

CR:

Mm-hm.

DS:

And do you have any siblings?

CR:

No.

DS:

So what was it like growing up, starting off from—

CR:

Small town, you know what I remember most is small town stuff, you know, as a little kid in Cuba, going down to the pier where I was told never to go and watching the fish under the pier, things like that that were kind of fun. And then in Barksdale where I was in the first through the third grades, not much to do there, you just, you do what you're supposed to do at the house and you get to chase a few bugs every now and then, and you go to school and stay out of trouble and that's about it, not very exciting, nothing very exciting with that. And then to Elk City, it's a small town, and so I did what all the kids would do in a small town, we'd go hunting up the creek—we lived right next to a creek—so it was just natural to go down there and mess around and build dams and, you know, just do foolishness like that down at the creek. But it did give you kind of an interesting eye for all of the reptiles and insects so I did a lot of that, and just hunt and look and that's worked real well for me as a photographer because I do know some of the useless trivia that is associated with that, and so I can identify a lot of these things because that's what I did as a kid, I really enjoyed that. I worked as a hobby at geology, and so I learned a little bit about that and a little bit about photography and a little bit about anything in nature. And so then I kind of expanded that with Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts, did make Eagle, so I enjoyed Boy Scouts and did a lot of camping. And then I guess that kind of changed into when you have a car, you like to drive your car instead of hiking and camping, so we changed and started doing a lot or storm chasing. So I've done that since the sixties, since '68, and you get better at it as you learn more about it, and of course when I came out here to Lubbock, it was really interesting because our roads here give you any direction you need to go, you can get around pretty quickly and stay out of the wrong part of the storm and keep an eye on it and chase it safely. So I've been chasing storms way before the movie twister made it cool [laugh].

DS:

Wow, so when did you move to Lubbock?

CR:

I moved here in '74—yeah, I think it was '74.

DS:

So the tornado had already been passed four years and—

CR:

Oh yeah, yeah, as a matter of fact I was working for Motorola since '74 and one of the problems that—I was a field tech rep, which is basically a troubleshooter—my degree is engineering, electrical engineering, and my specialty is communications, so I went work for Motorola to

resolve problems that might be causing trouble. And so one of my first trips put in to his area was to go to the Plains Building which is now Metro Tower, marked the NTS building, and back then it had no occupants and there were still skeletons of doves on the floor and the windows. Some of those windows were still out. This is several years after the tornado hammered the building, but they ended putting some radios on the top of that building, and so I had access to that back when it was just a shell.

DS:

Wow, was that an eerie feeling, walking in there?

CR:

It is, it's a little strange, and you know, you're left wondering, Why hasn't anybody fixed this up? Well, as I understand it, they didn't have the money to fix it up, and it was eventually sold for taxes to a pair of brothers out of Amarillo. And so, I've been in and out of that place ever since, and a lot of the antennas on top of Metro Tower, especially on the north part, are ones that I put up over a long career.

DS:

Well lets back up a little bit, you mentioned your engineering degree, but where did you go to high school?

CR:

Elk City, Elk City High School.

DS:

And where you thinking of college already at that time?

CR:

Like so many kids, you don't think about much that you need to be thinking about. It was more like when is school over? And when can I get out and go play? And so I went to the—my interest was always electronics—so as I decided I had to do something with college, I decided, Well, it would be best to go and get a degree in engineering. At that time, they were throwing people under the bus in Vietnam, and it seemed prudent to maintain a 2-S deferral, so I—barely—made passing grades and stayed with that at Oklahoma State University. And so that's where I got my degree, and by the time I graduated, they had quit pulling people into the draft, so I just went directly in to Dallas and started working with Motorola.

DS:

Wow, straight out of—how long did you work for Motorola?

CR:

Until 2000, but a little bit indirectly, I worked until '78 I believe it was, directly for Motorola as a field tech rep, first as an engineer then as a technical representative—troubleshooter—that's what I was really good at. And so they put me out here in Lubbock and I told them wasn't going to Lubbock, there was no way, I've been to Lubbock and I'm not going back, and my boss was very practical, he said, "You don't have to live in Lubbock, you can commute from Dallas if you want to, but that's where your job is and we don't pay for commuting so you might as well move out there," so I did [laugh], under duress. I like it now. It's okay, and I worked until '78 directly for them as a troubleshooter, then I bought a little small, one man radio shop that was called Lubbock Communications, and I developed it into a shop in Levelland and another shop Brownfield and then a ten man shop in Lubbock, and when they oil business pretty well went bust, we closed the Levelland and Brownfield service shops, but I still kept with my—Motorola has an authorized service facility. It's owned by me, but I would work with them as an authorized repair center and later sales and service as well. And so I pursued that, but when you're in the service business, as the owner of the business, you're basically on call 24/7 every day of the year, and you get tired of that after a while. Even though you have people on call, the customers that know you well, they're going to ring your phone at 3 a.m. anyway. And after putting up with that, it was a good and bad thing. I'm glad I did it, but I'm also glad I sold it in 2000 because that was about the last of the two-way radio era, if you will. Now nobody uses two-way radios except police, EMS, and very few others. Security will use it, but the cell phone business has just gutted the—

DS:

I was going to ask you how it impacted the business

CR:

Oh, it gutted it. It completely shut it down, and so where there were five competing shops in Lubbock, now there is one, and they try to, they charge very high rates, but they're making a go of it because there is no competition anymore, and so it's a whole different market, and I'm glad I'm out of that.

DS:

Yeah, because we could never have imagined the level of phone technology nowadays.

CR:

Back when I was going to Chicago for classes as I was working with Motorola as an engineer, that's how I first started, I met a gentlemen, a Norwegian I believe, or maybe he was a Swede, anyway a Scandinavian, that had a strange idea and he called it a cellular phone, and at that time Motorola had put six million dollars into the cellular development. They had a base station, one of them, they had two cellular phones that actually worked, and I got to disassemble and look

inside of one of the two. And so the guy that was showing us about the cellular concept that he had was the father of cellular communications. He developed the idea; he worked closely to make two prototype handsets and one prototype base station, and he was explaining the concept, and back then we always knew that higher and more powerful is better so if you could have a mountain top or a tall building, you know that's the way to go. His approach, he said, "That's wrong. Someday, we'll have antennas on every small building, on telephone poles, all over the neighborhood, there will be thousands and thousands of these in every city," and we just thought that was hilarious because we knew it was much better to put an antenna on a mountain top or a tall tower. And he said, "Yeah, and how many frequencies can you use?" and we said, "Well, depends on how many radios you have". And he said, "What I'm talking about is hundreds or thousands of channels on millions of base stations each using the same frequency over and over, allowing a subscriber base into the billions, not dozens" and then the lightbulb in my dense head went off and I realized, That's an amazing concept. But that's, he—

DS:

Transformed everything

CR:

He explained that to us back in the seventies, and it took a while for that to catch on. Some years later I happened to see the same guy on an interview on the discovery channel or something like that, and he had in his hand the first, one of the two prototypes, that he allowed us to kind of take the cover off and look and see, and he still had that in his hand and he's still going strong. That's an amazing character.

DS:

So what was in that first handset that you took apart?

CR:

It all looked like a—as a hobbyist I can building things from the circuit, I'll design something on paper and then build it and do all the construction, and so I know what a—what we would call a "home brewed project"—looks like, a homemade project. This looked like a homemade project done by someone who was extremely gifted, meticulous detail, but still had everything about it said this a prototype hand built. It had all of the—everything was constructed out of carefully soldered together pieces of copper, foil, everything was homemade, and it was just like a work of art. It wasn't like we see now, as everything is mass produced and so precise, this was clearly a homemade product but it was so sophisticated, it was beyond what I have ever attempted to build, and certainly I've never seen anything like it since. So it was a pleasure to get to take the lid off of something that Motorola valued roughly at three million dollars, and those were 1974 or 5 dollars. It was an expensive prototype.

DS:

Wow, and so, you know, you mentioned that it was such a big concept and once you wrapped your head around it, what did it feel like, where we were going, was it the right direction?

CR:

It seemed like a very logical way to go, and yet we didn't hear anything about it for a number of years, and when we finally did it was so expensive that you didn't have so much anything that you could put in your pocket, you would lug something around that had a big lead acid gel cell battery or a big battery and it was a luggable. It wasn't portable necessarily, but it was better than anything else, and it still had a handset with a cord that would just clamp on top of the box. So yeah, it could be carried with you and people thought that was wonderful because you could take it with you out to an oil rig and still have dial tone, and so they thought that was amazing, and of course people had, that could afford it, had mobile phones in their cars, but it had a bug cradle and a rotary dial, not even touch tone. So you would dial it like the old rotary dial phones. And sometimes you would get operator assisted calls to go through, and it was kind of hit or miss whether it would work, but at least that's where it started. And knowing what I knew about it in the seventies, I still didn't put it together as to this is the end of the two radio era, as I knew it. And so eventually, you know, you can't see the forest for the trees. And so we did sell cellular and it never occurred to me that everybody would have handsets like we have now and go through them like—you realize you get rid of your handsets faster than you go through shoes? And that's how it was, so when I finally decided, I'm going to sell this business and get out of it, I'm glad I did when I did because a year later was too late. In fact, my competition hung in there a few years more but couldn't make a go of it either and walked away and shut the door, so I was lucky to have been able to sell and get out. And so after that, I looked for something to do, and I decided that the thing would be to pursue full time what was previously just a hobby, and that's the photography. I did start as newspaper photographer when I was in high school, and so I've had the experience of the dark room and shooting with some nice black and white equipment. Had a three p.m. deadline that you had to have cropped and dried prints on the editor's desk, so he could select what he wanted, and that's what would end up in the newspaper that day. So I did that, and that's where you kind of learn how to do things in a hurry in a dark room, but some things can't be rushed. You still are dealing with film and you've got to do all of that procedure in the dark room then you have to print it and then you have wash it and dry it and get it down there by three and you better have your five pictures. So it was always a daily challenge to get that done, but it was a challenge, but it was also enjoyable, and so when I left that job and went on to college, I just kind of put that aside and never really picked it up again until I sold the business. Then it was time to switch from engineering and do the more artistic things that I had never done before, so I had to use the other side of the brain and kind of develop it.

DS:

I was going to ask you, is there more of an artistic—some differences artistically for prints that you're doing for art as opposed to a commercial application like for the newspaper?

CR:

Completely different styles and there are so many genres that are kind of subsets of an overarching kind of a thing. Event photography is essentially an offshoot of the newspaper photography because I'd go somewhere to shoot some something related to a specific event or happening of some sort and I'd document that and that's very similar to a wedding. You can get artistic in a wedding, but you also want to have the event covered and covered really well—close ups, wide shots, get the emotion involved, get those little back to the side vignettes where the little kids are playing because they're bored—get those pictures because you're creating a whole book of memories, and so you're documenting something in extreme detail that I might take three or four shots of a meeting or a new oil rig, first deep well, extremely deep, 30,000 foot well. You'll go out and document something like that as they're trying to see if they can find any natural gas deposits in western Oklahoma—they did. They had a nice oil boom and gas boom after that I covered the first wells that they put in the ground. And that was kind of an interesting thing, but—so that's a documentary, quite different than anything artistic.

DS:

Now over the years, as you've honed your craft, for, let's say like in wedding photography, can you look at the old stuff now, the way you do it, and see how you've grown?

CR:

I've only done less than a dozen wedding events, and my style has not changed because I have always tried to catch the details. Anybody can go out and catch the first kiss. They can always catch the nice photos of the bride and groom and so forth, but I also like to catch those little back events that are, that people miss. You've got to watch very carefully and be ready to grab a picture just on split second because it's gone if you missed it. You don't get to reshoot it.

DS:

And some of those details may be tapping in to you engineering background?

CR:

No, I don't it's—

DS:

Well, I mean as far as the mindset of, you know, everything counts.

CR:

Being there on time and getting there plenty early to scout the scene and know what the—that's where the engineering comes in because there are people that will go out and shoot a wedding and then they're shocked at how dark the church is. Ah, well what are they going to do about that? They're not prepared. I go out there a week or a month ahead, I know what—if I don't know what the building is like, I'll go scout it, and I'll figure out how to light it. That's where the engineering comes in, so that you've got redundancy and you've got your equipment ready and additional equipment, because as a troubleshooter, I'm very much aware that things will go—they will quit on you, you will be left high and dry if you don't have a backup or even a backup to that backup. So that's where, perhaps, the engineering comes in, is a good measure of caution to be certain that you have a good plan and a backup for that plan. But the artistic side of it, that's where you are looking for those special shots that show that you're doing more than just a documentary. So there's room to do the full, wide set there.

DS:

Wow, and you do nature shots also, don't you?

CR:

That's where the engineering is more, I guess, because if you're going to shoot an extreme close-up of something that's only a tenth of an inch long, you better be very creative on how you set [door opens, man speaks in the background] that up. Can you hold on a second?

[Recording device turns off]

[Recording Resumes]

DS:

Okay

CR:

Anyway, where were we?

DS:

We were talking about your photography, doing the close-ups of nature and that type of stuff. If you're going to do extreme close-ups, which is actually the definition of macro, you can take a picture of something very, very small and produce an image [drill noise in the background] that has such detail that it allows people to see a part of nature that we never ever get to see because how many people take a microscope or a magnifying glass and really study what a dragonfly looks like or a butterfly looks like that is blown up to be three feet across. So you see detail that is pretty fascinating that's missed by most everybody that's too busy getting the rent paid. They

miss all that stuff. And so that's where you've got to do a little more of the engineering to get everything staged so you can get in with extreme detail and ultra-resolution. So that's more of an engineering side of it. Then from there it kind of goes off into other styles that are quite different, like the portraits and the pet photos and that kind of thing.

DS:

You know you mentioned the lighting situation and buildings, how about out in nature when you're out shooting out there, how do you find the best light that works for what you want?

CR:

If you have the flexibility to shoot in the early morning, before and during and maybe an hour after sunrise or an hour before sunset, it's easier to do that. And of course sometimes you don't have the choice and you have to just shoot in the blazing heat of the day. That's not very—that's about the worst time of the day to shoot and so you try to find your place in open shade if you can, or bring the right equipment to provide your own open shade, and if you can't do that, you just try to overcome the sunlight with very, very bright lights and do some other technical things to compensate for it. But it's difficult; it's difficult. It's much easier in the studio where you can control every angle and every and every intensity and all of that kind of thing. So those are the things that, to me, make it more fun to shoot in the studio. But you have to be adaptive and you have to go out and do a shot in a cemetery at night for Halloween with smoke and make it look spooky, and, you know, have some atmosphere to it. So you have to do a little bit of creative illusion making to create the scene that you want, and that can be a real challenge when it's raining or it's windy or it's cold or whatever.

DS:

Yeah, and usually if you're doing something in Halloween it is doing one of those—

CR:

Absolutely, it's going to be unpredictable no matter what you do.

DS:

Yeah

CR:

Yeah, it'll be unpredictable

DS:

Which has been rewarding for you, the engineering career or the artistic career?

CR:

The engineering because that paid my way for thirty years and the artistic side of it might be more—I don't know if it's more challenging, I can't really say it's more challenging—it's just quite different. It's the difference between black and white. Totally different approach to everything, and to be a good photographer, I'm getting there, but I will never be there. You're always going to be in the learning mode, whether you're engineering, you better always continue your education forever. And if you're in photography or any other artist related field, you're never going to be there, you're always going to try to improve your art. And so I don't guess we're ever going to say, "I now have reached the pinnacle." And I don't think anybody ever does that. If they do, they get stale.

DS:

Well, even like technology, like it impacted your career, and it also, you know, in photography, you know, the swing has gone from film to digital, how have you handled that?

CR:

Fortunately, by the time I really got serious about digital photography, was probably 2005 or 6, and they had some pretty decent cameras out by then. Prior to that, all of my work was with film. And with the digital word I got in to kind of the first of that, and the quality was okay, not great, but okay. Now the quality is so extreme that we can only use the very finest glass because we want to have the sensors that are extremely good still be superior to the best glass you can buy. And if you have those two combined, mix in some talent, maybe you don't have any excuses for the picture not coming out right. But now the digital is, in many ways, superior to the film with some limitations, and those limitations you can do an engineering trick or two to get around those limitations, so all said, I wouldn't go to film for nothing [laugh]. It just—no way.

DS:

And how about the post reduction aspects?

CR:

That's where you can do anything, just about anything you want. You can take an old image and improve it and scan it in great detail, do some things to bring out contrasts that didn't exist before and create a photo that really would astonish the original photographer a hundred years ago. I think they'd look at it and go, "Wow, this is better than the original because it's not gray on gray, it's got whites and blacks and everything in between," and the cameras back then had a tough time creating that. But we can bring that out now.

DS:

Because even, like as a layman like myself, we look at photos that we took growing up as kids and look at what every person can take with their phones now, the quality is astronomical difference.

CR:

It is, and the ability of the cellphones, that used to be a joke five years ago, now they're very, very good. Don't know what that's going to mean to the photography field in general, it—my observation now might be a bit cynical, but I believe it has caused people to lower their expectations, where before if you wanted a portrait, it had to be done in a studio or something very special. It was expensive, it built up a very detailed, beautifully lit image, and people expected to pay a fair amount for that. Now people seem to have lowered their expectations, instead of nice portraits of the kids or even a nice event coverage that's in extreme detail, they get by with lousy shots with a cellphone. And as a photographer, I know those aren't as good as they could be, but crazy enough, apparently it's good enough for a lot of people. And I regret that because where did the detail, where did the excellence go? It's just whatever is good enough to get by, and I don't know if that going to be a continuing trend but our cellphones, for example, shoot pictures that are pretty good now, and in ten years I think they'll equal any resolution that I can shoot with very expensive digital cameras. I think you'll have that kind of ability in a cellphone, but just because you have a wonderful camera doesn't mean that you can shoot a wonderful photo any more than having an oven makes you an expert chef. And if you're going to be a good, competent photographer, there's an old adage that it takes 10,000 hours to be really good at anything, whether you are in the medical profession or art profession or engineering, it takes 10,000 hours to get good at something.

DS:

I wanted to make sure I had the counter going, I couldn't see it. You know, that's an interesting point you're bringing up, I was going to ask, you know, how do you do that, to keep, you know, people aware of, you know, the importance of what you do because other people just aim low, you know?

CR:

There are two areas of the market that seem to be doing well. The photographers that cater to the very low end crowd that want to buy an 8x10 for five or ten bucks. They'll be very busy but they'll be very hard pressed to make a profit because their time, they just cannot—there's a saying that "you can have quality or speed or cost, but you can't have all three." You can have quality and cost—you know, speed, quality and speed will cost you more, or you can have quality and cost, but it will take a while, a long time, to get to that. Everybody wants it all right now, and they want it for nothing, but what has to give way is the quality. You can't have all three. And so I see that as being kind of where we're at right now, and yet the high end photographers that sell their work for thousands of dollars, they work for a different cliental that

still appreciates quality. It's a small group, and it may be diminishing, it may be becoming less, not certain.

DS:

And where do you see the art of photography right now?

CR:

Where do I what?

DS:

See the art of photography right now?

CR:

I don't know where to go with that

Unknown Individual:

Take care.

DS:

Take care

Unknown Individual:

Nice meeting you

DS:

Yeah, it was nice meeting you

CR:

It's such a wide field, I don't know that there is a—it's like, where do you go with a motorized vehicle? There are so many different types or different purposes, it is so broad, there's something for everybody, and those that care to pursue it, whether you're shooting a landscape or portraits or event photography or scientific/medical, they're completely so different as to be barely related to each other. They all adhere to the physics of light, and so you have to be able to deal with the physics of light, perhaps that's where an engineering background helps. That part is easier for me, but then you also have to be creative, and having not done that for thirty years, I'm still learning, and will always be learning that aspect of it—to be artistically creative because I don't see myself as an artist, I see myself as an artist wannabe that pursues it very diligently and occasionally has the—every now and then, something that really, really looks great. You know it when you see it, and you know it when you miss it. And then you have to figure out, What do I

need to do to make that better? And I've been doing that since 2000, so fifteen years into it and I just realized, the better I get, the more I realize how little I really know.

DS:

Yeah, I was going to ask what keeps you going. Is that it?

CR:

Mm-hm, that's it. Yeah. There's—you're never going to say "Okay, I now know it all." That's not going to happen. Always new developments, always something new that's intriguing that catches my interest. If that ever stops being the case I'll do something else because I always want to be learning, and that's something that is universal, I think. If you just get lazy, what's the purpose?

DS:

And another thing you've started artistically here is the Lubbock Sketch Artist group that you've created. Talk to us about how that idea came about, how you started it.

CR:

I just—some friends were in to doing the drawing/sketching, and they had a very small group at the Garden and Arts Center over on University, and they didn't have enough people to really be able to afford to pay a model and to draw, and so my wife and I hosted that for a few years, just in our living room, and when I had this space here at the studio, which is 2,200 square feet, we had enough room that we could do that here, and so I've been allowing them to meet here a couple of times a month, just for free, just because I like to help support their cause. I personally can't draw a decent stick figure, never have and never will.

DS:

I did not know that.

CR:

I am not an artist as a sketch artist; I am astonished at the quality that they do. I can't get my head around it. I love seeing what they can do but I realize as that Clint Eastwood movie, you've got to know your limitations. Well, that's my limitations. But I can still help them.

DS:

Well, I was going to ask, because, you know, what's it feel like when you see somebody that progresses from drawing a rough stick figure to being able to create a work of art.

CR:

I've never seen anybody go through that amount of progression. I see them getting better, but they are so darn good. The first ones that I have seen them draw compared to the most recent, they're still excellent! [laugh] So I don't know. I've never seen someone go from—now in photography, I have seen that, where I've worked with people that I have taught them the very basics in photography, lighting; how to control it, how to use different tools, and they were like a babe in the woods. They did not know which way was north and they didn't know the basics. Soon enough they knew the basics and then they started doing things that were a little beyond basics, and some of the photographers now shoot weddings, for example—terrific work, amazing work. And I've seen them go from the very beginning to being a very accomplished wedding photographer. I'm happy that I was able to teach them some basics—now they can teach me some techniques that they know that I need to learn, so it's nice when the teacher becomes the student. And together you give and take pieces of knowledge that you might have about this that I do well and something that they do well that I need to learn, and I work with several photographers that are like that, and that's fun.

DS:

You know, you mentioned that a 1,000 hours in to something—

CR:

10,000.

DS:

10,000 and I was thinking, at what point do you see it going—someone going from it being a craft to it being an art?

CR:

Those are—I don't know that I distinguish the two.

DS:

Okay.

CR:

Because a craft is a technique, and it's the art that makes that technique produce something of interest. So I see a craft as how to get there, that's the process of controlling light, that's a craft, but the art is where you take that image of someone, and the next thing you know you've combined them with a scene from a forest, and now there is fog in the trees and a flowing outfit, and it looks like maybe something that you might have seen in *Lord of the Rings* or something, that's a fantasy shot. And it had, obviously nothing ever like it in reality but they can create that in to a scene that is amazingly gifted and artistic. And they started out with something that you

would not recognize as being some of the elements that were incorporated in to this massive production, so that to me is where the art is, and that goes beyond just simple photography. That takes it to the next level, and I doubt if I will ever be there, but I keep pursuing it.

DS:

I think that everybody that's in those fields keeps pursuing that, don't they?

CR:

When you see it done right, you really look at it and just, your jaw opens and your—wow, you know, you just, it's amazing. And when you see it not done so right, you realize this is going to look better next time and the time after that. And eventually it will be that kind of amazing work.

DS:

Mm-hm, yeah, you know, we're talking beforehand and you mentioned something I didn't know about you, and that was your flying. Talk about how that started, what the learning curve was like and what you've done.

CR:

I guess the flying started out first with hot air balloons, and I got my license to pilot balloons, and you better be kind of self-reliant because when you go on your first solo flight, it's all up to you whether you live through the experience or not because a balloon can go up to 30,000 feet, your air is not that good, so obviously you don't want to go up very high, it also can get in to power lines or get in to trouble a lot of different ways, so you want to be well educated and know the basics and then be cautious and plan way ahead of where you are at the moment. Because with a hot air balloon, it takes a minute or two to get your heating to really translate into gaining altitude, or the inverse of that. So you have to be able to deal with whatever comes along. On my first solo flight, one of the things that can go wrong—if you have any water in your propane, when it expands it can freeze, and if it freezes it can block the gas from getting to the burner. In my case, it caused the blast valve that you turn on and off to put this 12,000,000 BTU **[British Thermal Unit]** heater in to play or not, it froze in the on position, and I couldn't turn it off. And so what you have to do with that kind of a situation is go to a different kind of a valve and leave it partially open and control your altitude by turning off the valve at the tank. And I did that, and eventually it melted and I was able to regain control of the balloon. But this is on my solo flight, and you just have to be creative to survive. And it's not a big deal because you know the principles, you know what's going on, why it's doing that, what you can do to correct it, but I didn't expect that would happen on my first solo flight, and yet there it was. So from that, you plan ahead, and in the case of ballooning where you're at the mercy of the breeze or wind or whatever, you'd better plan way ahead. And that also goes in to flight planning with fixed wing, which I did after that, with the gliders and with the powered flight, and again, I'm just a private pilot with a VFR **[Visual Flight Rules]** rating, so I don't have the instrument ratings and I know

my limitations and I do plan ahead, and I don't go tweak the tail of the tiger to see if I live through it or not. Some people like that; I'm not like that, I don't do the aerobatics, and I just use it to go from one point to another. And I enjoy it, but it's not something that I will ever make a career out of. But to me, it's just a way of getting from A to B and do it a lot more efficiently than I can with driving. And, of course, I've never had a problem where the plane left without me so that's good [laugh]. I like that.

DS:

You know, how about, you know, nowadays we have this thing going with drones invading the airspace, have you ever had any encounters with drones?

CR:

The only encounters I ever have had with drones are from a standpoint of fascination as an engineer and a photographer. Seeing the guys at Arches National Park, they had drones that were \$20 or \$30,000 worth of equipment that's airborne. They had two pilots—they had two people to fly this thing. One was the pilot that kept it out of trouble and the other was the photographer, they had separate video streams, and so the pilot was taking care of flying the drone where he needed it to be, and the artist, or the photographer/videographer, had a separate stream and he was controlling the pan/tilt/zoom of the camera to get the best video. And they were going to all the National Parks before the National Parks Service outlawed doing that because they knew that the video that they shot would never be created again in most cases, and so they were going from National Park to National Park doing this as quickly as they could, and I was fascinated to see this in person. Beautiful quality work—amazingly—at the very cutting edge of drones. And these were by responsible people that weren't the idiots that—like any tool, be it a camera, or a gun, or a drone, it can be used or misused—and these were very responsible people that were doing beautiful work, and I enjoyed that, and when you see that—that's been my experience with the drones. I've never had an experience where there's a drone that swishes by you as you're flying an airplane, they're in the wrong space, and I understand the FAA [**Federal Aviation Administration**] has to step in and make some rules just as they did with the ultra-lights, it used to be that ultra-lights could be flown from the city park because the FAA said, "It is not an airplane, it is a kite," so I have taken off with ultra-lights from some of the city parks. Now you can't do that. They'll get all over you for that. But back then, it was kind of where the drones are today. You could fly it if you—because the law hadn't caught up with the technology. And if you were dumb, I guess you could take it up and fly it—this is back when the T-38s were in the pattern at Reese Airbase—if you're really stupid, you could take it up there and go up 5,000 feet or 10,000 feet, mix it up with the T-38s. I think that's not very smart, and so we would stay low and actually we flew ultralights based out of where the Lowe's Hardware is now over on Frankford, we had the ultralights stored in that Knott's Mini Storage shed and we'd bring it out, and we'd launch it on that field that's now the Lowe's Hardware store. And so we'd fly it around

out there, but the T-38's were overhead, and we didn't ever get very high and we kept it where we were safe, and we didn't get in their way, that's why I'm here today [laugh], to talk with you.

DS:

Well, you know, be, you know we were talking about—you have that one interesting story about being in a glider with someone. Could you relate that story?

CR:

When I was interested in doing the, getting a glider rating—which I never did, I went straight over to the powered flight instead of the glider—but I was interested in being a glider pilot and so I invited, I asked a guy that I knew, “Could you take me up and show me what this Blanik aerobatically rated glider could do?” And it wasn't for the adrenaline rush, I just wanted to see what it could do if it were beyond the usual up and down. And so he took me out of Town & Country Airport down south of town, we were towed behind a plane and he cut loose at about 3 or 400 feet above the ground because we had just passed through a nice updraft—one of these little whirlwinds that we see in the summer—and that what looked like a very small whirlwind on the ground took us up to 14,000 feet, and that's up pretty high for a glider, but typical of what they do, or they can go much higher actually if they're carrying oxygen. We did a few maneuvers to kind of let, satisfy him that I wasn't going to get sick in his airplane [laugh] and lose my lunch. And we did some maneuvers that were interesting, that showed the ability of the glider, and then he took it in to three full 360 degree loops that ended up down by the airport, but he came in off of the recovery of the final loop lowest to the ground at top speed, and he made a pass down the runway, but instead of landing, he was at right at the maximum airspeed and only a couple of feet off the runway. The pilot was extremely good, but he was kind of flexing his muscle, took us down the length of the runway, then he pulled back and went back through a regular pattern like you would do in a fixed powered aircraft and landed that thing just beautifully. It was quite an experience to see that kind of agility, and he was really showing me what a glider could truly do. I decided to go ahead and get my private powered fixed wing aircraft license simply because that's easier to do as a single person, you don't need a tow plane. And it made more sense to me to be a—learn that so I could be a better pilot because, having not been a pilot, trying to control a glider takes enough finesse that I wasn't very good at it, and so by learning as a private to do it the more customary approach, you still have, you know when you nail a landing exactly right, and there can be no other way as far as I'm concerned because you want to go for extreme precision. If you can keep on a cross country, if you can keep your heading within ten or twenty degrees and three or four hundred feet, that might be good enough for some people, but for me, I was taught to keep it within a degree of heading and within twenty feet of elevation. Good luck giving that a try, especially in the summer when the thermals have their way of bouncing you around. But you keep going back to extreme precision if you can, and the idea is if you're good enough to make that happen and you do that routinely, that's the next step for being an instrument rating, which I never got. I couldn't justify the cost of that, and more

importantly than even the cost is if you're going to get an instrument rating, you have to have a certain minimum number of hours flying to be legal, that's not good enough for me. You have to have a lot more hours to be extremely proficient, because with the proficiency comes your chances of survival. Keeping legal is just—keeps the feds off of your case. But to be proficient and very proficient at it, I knew I could never afford that. And so rather than to try to push that, I just backed off the instrument rating and just—I'd rather be a very very good fair weather pilot than to be a dangerous instrument pilot. And so that's the caution, maybe that's where I learned that caution with the balloons, you can't take a chance. It will bite you, and it's not a matter of "it might," I think given enough time, it will bite you if you're not very very proficient and have a cautious approach to that.

DS:

And plus, you know, from your training in engineering, you're a problem solver.

CR:

I'm used to things going wrong [laugh]. So yeah, that's what I do. That's what I did. That's how I worked. I know something's going to go south, and so when you're building a project, you're designing a circuit, or building a tower—my towers never came down—they might have been over-engineered in the interest of safety and make a very robust installation, but they weren't wiggly wobbly things that fell down on the first thunder storm. Some of those are still standing today, and that's the way I was taught to do that.

DS:

You know, talking about standing still—still standing today—you came to Lubbock in '74, forty one years later, what do you think of it?

CR:

You mean as the career choice or—

DS:

No, you said there was a certain amount of, Oh I really don't want to be in Lubbock—

CR:

I had been to Lubbock, yeah, where are the mountains, where's the, you know, you can't go snow skiing, you can't go water skiing to speak of, it's just in the middle of nowhere. I guess it's 600 miles in middle of everywhere because you can choose your destinations based on that. I would rather be in the Pacific Northwest, I would prefer that, but I'm told by the people that live there that once you've been through their rains, you'll appreciate where you can go and you see blue skies. Every place has drawbacks; I'm reminded of that when the sky is brown. I'm reminded of that when I'm relying on my knowledge of severe weather to know whether I'm

really in trouble or not, but if you go off to the West where you don't have tornadoes, you have earthquakes or other issues; fires, sandstorms still are a challenge unless you get to the Northwest, then you have rain all the time. So I guess there's always something pro and con any place that you happen to live.

DS:

You know, we really didn't cover that area, though. You just mentioned it, of your training in severe weather and all that. You want to talk about that, how you got in to that?

CR:

Well, when I was in western Oklahoma, one of my first jobs was I delivered fireworks. I would drive to Tulsa from Elk City, about 200 miles, and I'd load a pickup full of fireworks—I mean full—and bring it out to western Oklahoma, and then I'd drive a route where I delivered fireworks for my boss, and one of the times that I was out in far southwestern Oklahoma, I watched a thunderstorm develop, and it became a supercell, which I didn't know what to call it at the time, but it was just a very, very large storm and I, by luck if nothing else, I was through with my delivery and so I just kind of kept tabs on it as I came back in to Elk City, and for roughly sixty or seventy miles, I kind of went along with that storm until I got to Elk City where my boss was. And so I called off the trip there, but that storm went on and dropped a tornado on the city of Hammon, Oklahoma, with a couple of fatalities. And so that tornado developed shortly after I quit chasing it, and I always thought I would like to do that and know more about it, and so from that time on I kind of became interested in it and with my electronics communications experience and training and also as a hobby as a Ham radio operator, I would—we were able to keep in touch very easily. And so we established a storm sky warn group out here on the South Plains and as an engineer I designed and built and constructed and installed and financed all of this, these communications systems and linked them together so we had wide area coverage and I'm the one that put that in and financed it and maintained it. But I also used it in—we developed a group of about twenty spotters that were getting better, the National Weather Service worked closely with us and brought in excellent, superbly excellent instructors that would teach us advanced spotter training that went way beyond, not to what a meteorologist would perhaps learn but way beyond what the average layman would know about storms and severe weathers, and in particular the technique of safe chasing. There's areas you want to be depending on the storm, areas you don't ever want to be, one place you're going to be—worst place you could be with severe weather is to be what we would call a participant, you're not spotting, you're a participant. That's the wrong place because you don't know what's coming. And if you're spotting safely, you're going to be outside of the danger area but where you can still see what's going on and you can follow a storm from southwest of Lubbock all the way into Oklahoma, and we've done so. And it's amazing to see some of these remarkably powerful storms, and I'm talking about the supercells that have tremendous energy. We would follow those, and it's an interesting, it's a fascinating thing to watch. I've seen my share of tornadoes, I've issued

warnings back to the national weather service that took our advisory and issued warnings based on what I've seen, what our group has seen. Putting eyes on a storm in a field was more critical than it is now when you have Doppler radar, which they can see a vortex in a cloud long before the spotters can see it. But still it helps to have spotters to actually put an eye on it, and back then they didn't have the Doppler and they didn't have that kind of capability, so we were kind of the eyes of the national weather service. And so that was fascinating, and I've always enjoyed that to this day, and that knowledge stays with you. So when you see something that's dangerous, you know it's dangerous, and you know to move out of its way and get into a safe area. I don't run in to a hole in the ground, I'll maneuver around it. Now, if you're in Eastern Oklahoma, Arkansas, Mississippi, where those things come in at night, that's where the real scary is because you can't see it, there are trees, the roads don't exist to make an easily maneuverable area. The guys that do storm chasing out there, they've got a penchant for adrenaline that I don't have [laugh]. That's scary stuff to me.

DS:

You know, I was going to ask about the, you know, you mentioned that you've tracked them for extended period of times, how does—does fatigue affect you at all when you're in something like that?

CR:

Not on something like that. You're fascinated, you're very alert to what's going on around you, the biggest danger is not tornados, I think the biggest danger is crazy drivers that are panicked by the storm, and they'll run over you. The next most dangerous thing is probably lightning or if you're traveling in areas that you're not familiar with, maybe you encounter an unexpected stream of water over the road and you're hydroplaning so you've got to be very careful with your driving, you can't be like some of the people are that I've seen on the Discovery Channel. They drive like they're race car drivers, putting everybody at risk. That's not the way you do storm spotting. It's more of a game of strategy. You position yourself in the right spot and you don't put other people in danger while you're doing that. And you don't need to drive an armored vehicle like these guys on the Discovery Channel passing people over the tops of hills, that's dangerous driving, you don't do that. That's a lot more dangerous than the storms.

DS:

You know what, I think a lot of things you've mentioned that have happened, it's really more about, speaks more about where our society is, you know, where we want everything now, we're self-indulgent, so we do these things where we put others at risk and just—

CR:

Immediate me, immediate gratification. Whatever it is, you want it right now, and it's all about the me and that's—I don't know what ever happened to allow that to become more prevalent, but

it needs to stop. And maybe that makes me sound like I'm just an old fogey, but I know what it was like, I know what it is like. In western Oklahoma, farmers would have a rifle in the back window of their pickup. No one would ever think to get in to his unlocked pickup and mess with his rifle. If you did that and you got caught, you'd get taken to the alley and educated. We just knew not to do that. Now it's like we try to have a law for everything and nothing works. Common sense seems to be rather uncommon.

DS:

Well, you know, I've taken up the bulk of your afternoon, but I've really enjoyed listening to you.

CR:

I got a—you've got to steer me on course occasionally.

DS:

Well, I think—is there anything I cover that you'd like to talk about?

CR:

Oh, there's lots of things [laugh]. There's lots of things, but that'll be for another day.

DS:

Okay, then another day when you're ready for me to come in—

CR:

My please, my pleasure, enjoyed it.

[End of Recording]