



JOE BEELER
1931-2006

1995
Renowned Western Artist and Sculptor



The following is an oral history interview with Joe Beeler (**JB**) conducted by Zona Davis Lorig (**ZL**) for Historical League, Inc. on September 15, 1994 at Joe Beeler's home in Sedona.

*Transcripts for website edited by members of Historical League, Inc.
Original tapes are in the collection of the Arizona Historical Society Museum Library at Papago Park, Tempe, Arizona.*

ZL: Congratulations on being named a 1995 Historymaker.

JB: Well, thank you, thank you, Zona, it's really an honor and a privilege.

ZL: Would you begin by telling where you were born and when if you so desire.

JB: I was born in a little town in the southwest corner of Missouri, Joplin, Missouri. And it was known mainly for mining. My father was a miner and my granddad had been a miner. Those folks came there after the Civil War from Tennessee, moved into that part of the country and its right in the corner. It's like 12 miles from Oklahoma, 10 miles from Kansas and about 18 miles from Arkansas, so you get the flavor of all those places there and it was a nice little town to grow up in and then I moved to Oklahoma later. I went to school in Tulsa, went to Tulsa University, but the influence of that region there was part of the things that I painted and drew later. I drew upon some of those experiences.

ZL: What did they mine there in Joplin?

JB: It was lead and zinc. But my dad worked for about 20 years in the northeast corner of Oklahoma; that's where the mines were and I grew up thinking probably some day I'd have to do that but my calling was elsewhere. None of those nasty tools like shovels, or hammers, or hoes, or rakes fit my hand very good but long time ago I found that pencils and brushes and things like that did. I could always



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draw and paint and some of my earliest recollections were of drawing. I was always the kid that people brought things to me to draw and so I more or less grew up thinking that everybody knew how to draw. The older I got, the more serious I got about my art and of course the more I was drawn away from thinking about any other occupation as far as the mining or anything like that. So after a while and as I got older, I got more serious about my art. While it was a native talent or instinct for me, I realized that if I was going to be a professional, I needed training and I was really going to have to work hard at it.

ZL: Were your parents artistic?

JB: Not really. They were creative but my family was too busy, I guess, in trying to make a living to have the luxury of knowing whether or not they had abilities like I was fortunate enough to go ahead and pursue. But there was not an artist in my family. I've been asked that before and I can't find one. I know sometimes that runs in families but not necessarily in mine. But it definitely was a native ability because like I said, I can remember back, that was a very early thing that I remember and a love that I had so it was always there. I was born with the love to draw and the desire to be an artist.

ZL: Did your parents encourage you?

JB: They did. They did encourage me and I was – I grew up in an environment where that wasn't necessarily a thing that boys did, but I did all the other things. I mean it wasn't that I just sat around and drew pictures all the time; I participated in all the sports and things. Of course the first thing I did was get a horse when I got up and got to making a little bit of money-bought me a horse.

ZL: How old were you?

JB: I had a pony when I was a kid. My dad bought me a pony. I had an uncle that was a rancher near Miami, Oklahoma and they had horses and things and they got a pony from him for me. As soon as I could, I paid forty dollars for this horse – the first horse that I had – bought it at the killer plant where they were killing the horses for food processing. I saved this one with my forty dollars and we would rope. We would go out and rope. There's a little arena outside the edge of town. We tried to rope calves and goats. We roped goats a lot then. But anyway, those were things that I loved to do as a young man and my art was just always a part of that. It seemed like anything that I went to do or got involved in, I ended up drawing about it or the people that I was around became my subject matter, whether it was a cartoon or a serious drawing or painting, I was influenced in trying to put down the things that I was around. Even later on when I was in school, I drew cartoons and I used to get in a lot of trouble for some of my drawings (chuckle). Then in the service I ended up doing some drawing actually – cartoons for *Stars and Stripes*; so drawing's always been there for me.



ZL: Did you like history in school?

JB: I did. Geography and history were two favorite subjects of mine. I was kind of a dreamer, romantic in that respect and I loved to read and to study about things that have gone on in the past, our history and other history, and have always been fascinated with that and with geography—places, and that’s another thing that plays a role in my art. I love to relive or try to relate and relive historical subjects and it is fun to do that. A lot of times I go to the place where a certain event happened and will try to recreate that in my mind. It’s a thing that a lot of different western artists have been involved in. Like today, half of our – the guys in our CA group will paint the things that they’re around, the contemporary scenes; and then about half of them paint historical or romanticize the subject.

ZL: And you’re kind of split.

JB: I’m split really. I paint and draw and sculpt things I’m around all the time and then I love to do the historical things where I go do research and put the thing together in my mind and relive it. I really enjoy that. I also like to get a story telling quality sometimes in my work when I can, and I also like humor. I enjoy getting a little of that in there when I can.

ZL: Now when you do a historical painting or sculpture, is it based maybe on something you’ve been reading about recently or a story that you heard your family tell? How do you determine your subject matter?

JB: Well, there are two different approaches I take. One of them, as I just said, are things that I’m involved in like going out here to a ranch during a roundup and the branding. There’s always some activity, some action, some drama, something going on out there that makes a wonderful picture or a sculpture. There’s always something goes on that will make a good picture. And by the same token, a lot of times I’m reading or I’m someplace in an area like I was up in Montana early this spring working cattle. We were at a branding and I helped brand. We branded 900 calves but we rode over country where Chief Joseph had been and I’m very interested in that subject. I rode along there as we would get up early in the morning and make a ride out there a long time before sun-up. It came to my mind thinking about all those Nez Perce with their families moving along maybe a similar trail over that country with the American Army, the Cavalry behind them. What must have been in their minds coming to creeks and rivers that they had to cross, watching the sun come up and knowing that they had seen the sun come up in the same place? Those are the kinds of things that’s inspiring to me and often times I’ll come home and start a process of gathering this information together and then putting that down in the form of a painting or sometimes a sculpture.

ZL: One of your grandmothers was on a wagon train on the Oregon Trail. Is that right?



JB: My grandmother that lived with us. My mother's mother, when she was a young girl, had actually gone up the Oregon Train and had some interesting stories to tell about the process of going along and the oxen getting sore feet and them having to wait a few days for the oxen to rest up. She told a story about my great-grandmother. They got up there in Oregon and the men were off working. They had built a log cabin but they didn't have a door up yet. My grandmother, and her mother, my great-grandmother, were in there with the kids. They were fixing breakfast and a big bear just walked through the door. I guess it smelled that breakfast cooking and so it just walked right through there and my great-grandmother, the only thing she could think of, she had a skillet of hot grease and she threw the skillet of hot grease in the bear's face and of course the bear turned around and lit out. I always admired that. It shows something about the character of the people in those days (chuckle) and it's a wonderful story.

ZL: And then that family moved to California later?

JB: No, no, no. They ended up coming back and then her father ended up on the Cherokee Run, went out on the strip during the run and staked a claim there. But it's interesting, my family on both sides had been here a long time and my interest in American history and the frontier and the movement west and the pioneer and the subject and the drama and the adventure must have been planted in a very early age for me. I remember those stories when I was a child, and as I grew up they magnified and stirred me to want to somehow be a part of that or re-create that. I guess that's instilled in me somehow.

ZL: In the summertime you went to Oklahoma and took part in Pow Wows?

JB: Well like I say, I grew up in a part of the country where my father on his side of the family had Cherokee blood and we grew up to be proud of that and we used to go to Pow Wows when I was a child, when I was a little kid, too young to actually participate. Then many of my best friends were Indians, were Native Americans. I learned about that culture and learned to participate in the summertime going to Pow Wows. It was just part of the enjoyment of the summertime and I would even go dance sometimes. I would dance and I knew the songs and like in the evening at a Pow Wow, when the Feather Dancing, you dance in feathers and the drummers are sitting out in the middle of the arena and the women have all got their best dresses on and the best dancers are there for the fun. Then there's a competition, and everybody dances there for two or three hours. Then they go back to their camps and everybody would put their Levis and boots on, and then come back. There's other dances at night that are social dances like the Forty-nine Dance and the Stomp Dance; and sometimes we'd go and a lot of times it would be morning when we finished. So those things I did and even Sharon, we still go back on the Fourth of July. I've had Sharon out there stomp dancing at night. It's the thing that gives me a feel for what I do and the feeling I think I have for the subject, both the cowboy and the settlers and the pioneers and the Anglo – the white history and also the Indian history.



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ZL: And you're very sympathetic to both of those cultures.

JB: Yeah. Well, I am and I'm more aware every day of these things. As you get older, you have more of an appreciation for the past – your country's past and your own past. You cherish those things every day and it's a great privilege to be an artist and be able to express yourself and put these things down for your own enjoyment and then hopefully for the enjoyment of others.

ZL: When you came to Arizona the first time, you were about eighteen?

JB: I'd come out here right after high school with a couple of friends and we ended up in the Valley. I ended up working for John T. Hughes down there feeding cattle and working down there out of Chandler. I just fell in love with Arizona and this was in about 1950. I always wanted to come back. I knew that Arizona was the place for me. Later on after Sharon and I were married we came through here going to Art Center School. I went out to Art Center School for a year on the GI Bill and we drove down through here and drove through Sedona which at that time was just a little wide spot in the road with a filling station and a store. It was just a region. Sharon had never spent any time in Arizona. She fell in love with it and she said, "This Arizona isn't such a bad place and if we could move to someplace like that, I think I'd really like it." At that time we had no idea because we had zero money and I was going to school. My career had not developed really and we didn't know where we were going to end up but one thing led to another and we kept focused on Arizona. At a point, a couple of years later, we said, "Let's go, now's the time." I had actually had a show—one of the first important one man shows at the Montana Historical Society—and I had a group of paintings up there. It was a lot of lookers and it was very successful, but there weren't very many buyers. At the last day, the time they were taking the show down, a collector came through there and bought five paintings. Of course at that time that didn't amount to a great deal of cash but it was enough money to allow us to decide to move to Arizona. We got to Sedona here and we had about—I think when we got to town I was driving a 1955 Chevy pickup and a few belongings and a U-Haul trailer and about twelve hundred dollars to last forever and I've still got twenty-six dollars. (Both laugh)

ZL: After you graduated from high school, you went to Tulsa University.

JB: I went to Tulsa University for a year and a half and I got some wonderful training there from a guy who was head of the art department there, Alexander Hogue. He was a well-known painter from Texas who had painted the Dust Bowl era and was a representational artist. I learned to enjoy lithography that he taught and it was a good experience for me. I had some life drawing, and of course Tulsa was like home to me, kinda. I loved the area, but I left there and then I went to Missouri University for one semester.



ZL: In Columbia.

JB: In Columbia. I had thought about writing too and thought that would be another interesting way to be able to express yourself, and Missouri was a great journalism school; but the Korean War was going on then, and about that time I went into the military.

ZL: Did you enlist?

JB: No, no I didn't. I was drafted and went with basic training to Fort Riley, Kansas and from there I ended up in Korea, went to Japan, ended up in Korea for a year.

ZL: You were in a medical unit?

JB: I was assigned to the 21st Station Hospital and the 25th Station Hospital and I wasn't a medic but that was the way it worked out; I was assigned to those places. And even there I got to draw. I picked up some art supplies and so the first thing, I was sending things off and they were in *The Stars and Stripes*. Then I ended up getting my MOS changed to a combat artist but the war had ended and I got to draw and made some Bill Mauldin type cartoons and drawings. I was a great fan of his "Willy and Joe," documenting the Second World War. But anyway, I was fortunate enough to get through that without any mishaps and got home, that's where I met Sharon. After I got home there, I saw Sharon and –

ZL: And that was where?

JB: That was in Joplin. I was down there and Sharon was going to Arkansas University and she had a career all set for herself and I . . .

ZL: In what field?

JB: Well she was going to school and she wanted to be a professional woman. Sharon had majored in art and is very artistic herself and has been a great asset to me in my career. You can sit and talk to her just like talking to one of my CA friends. She's got a great eye and a great sense of color. But anyway, we met and we went out just a few times and I asked her to marry me. I knew what I wanted and I hoped that she was in agreement. It kind of scared her, it happened so fast, and she said, "Take me home. I've got to think about this." But I didn't give her too much time to think about it and within a couple months we were married. We just had our anniversary, it was the 31st of August and that was our 38th.

ZL: That's wonderful.



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JB: So we've been married happily for 38 years.

ZL: Nice track record.

JB: Yeah.

ZL: And then you went to Kansas State at Pittsburgh.

JB: Then I graduated from Kansas State at Pittsburgh and there of course I pursued—what I was thinking about then - if I'd go ahead and get my degree that if worse came to worse, what was important to me was to pursue my love for Western art. At that time, there was no market established much and everything was still pretty much undecided and undetermined in that department. So I went to school there with aims to graduate and maybe get a teacher's degree. If worse came to worse, I could be in some little town in the West where they had a nice little college where I could teach and pursue my painting. At that time just painting, I had not sculpted any at that time. So that was the plan. Anyway, I went ahead and graduated and never even went to my graduation. We lit right out. I was enrolled at Art Center School and I had a little GI bill left and I had the two friends, Ed Larson and Shannon Wheeler who were going to school at Art Center and they said, "You've got to come out here and see . . ."

ZL: That was L.A.

JB: Yeah. It was a wonderful school and it still is a wonderful school. It was one of the really great schools and you were almost assured of being exposed to the best teachers and some of the best painters and draftsmen. But the idea was to get through the school and be in advertising or illustration—commercial illustration. And there too, I still didn't want to go to any big city, I wanted to stay in the West and most of the guys going through that school, they were going to go on to Chicago or New York or someplace because that's where the money was and that's where the careers were. But that wasn't my plan. I wanted to go there and learn as much as I could from these great teachers and then go back and apply it to my own chosen field which was Western art. So after we went there three semesters, I turned around and Sharon and I went – well, Tracy was born in California.

ZL: Your daughter?

JB: Yeah, our daughter was born in California and of course I had more responsibility then, and Sharon had worked and put me through school there. She had worked at Young and Rubicam Advertising Agency until the last minute, so she had worked there all the time I was going to school. I couldn't have done it if she hadn't have worked. But anyway, when Tracy came along, then we went back home and



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then I just started painting. I got an illustration job from the University of Oklahoma Press and Savoie Lottinville looked at my portfolio and gave me some work. We were living in a little place, Five Mile it was called, Five Mile, Oklahoma, along a little creek. It was named for Five Mile Creek. My friend, my great friend, Eddie Basha is always kidding and joking about those were the rabbit and squirrel and quail days when I had to shoot what we ate, but that was very true. Half of what we ate was what I killed and brought to the table. Needless to say, I think that was the skinniest Sharon ever was, when we lived in Five Mile because of the idea of me bringing two or three rabbits and two or three quail up and skinning them on the porch and throwing them in a pot, or a couple of frogs.

ZL: She never knew what she was going to get for dinner.

JB: But that was fun times and I developed, I focused more on really my determination to pursue what I wanted to. When we lived down there, I knew that's what – we were starving to death practically, but I still knew that's what. . . .

ZL: So you didn't get discouraged?

JB: No, no, and then Sharon was wonderful. She put up with all that and encouraged me. She knew that's what I wanted to do and she wanted to help me. She never complained once and we went through those times having fun and a good time, and we had a lot of friends around there. It sounds like a hardship when you talk about it or look back, but it was wonderful times.

ZL: Attitude changes a lot of things.

JB: Yeah. We had a great time there, and we would go down to Gilcrease and I'd be inspired looking at the wonderful Russell's and Remington's that they had there in the collection and I told Sharon, that's what I want to be someday.

ZL: You mentioned the Gilcrease. Would you describe that museum?

JB: Well, the Gilcrease Museum is –Thomas Gilcrease was an oilman in Oklahoma, and he put together probably one of the greatest, well it is the greatest collection of Western Americana in the country today. The museum was small at that time and he lived on the premises there and I'd met Mr. Gilcrease. He was part Creek Indian and on their allotment down there in Southern Oklahoma, oil had been discovered and so he was very wealthy. But he was very intelligent and he was a good businessman. He loved Western art and the history—art and artifacts pertaining to the history and development of our country. Not only are there paintings and bronzes and sculptures there, but there are documents and books and papers and things which are unbelievable in the basement of that museum, that people aren't even aware



of. Later on the museum was expanded and today a lot of the works that were still in the basement, when they didn't have room to put it, are up there for you to see. But in those days, most of that stuff was stored in the basement; they had so much, and it was rotated.

Later on when Jim Forest was there, I had a show in 1961. They had never had any shows for contemporary Western artists—any contemporary artists—and I had a show there in 1961 which was a very important point in my career. Later on I went there and talked to my friend, Fred Meyers, and they decided to have me have a show there again. That was the start of what they called the Rendezvous Shows which were twenty or maybe thirty shows later that were to follow. Mine was the first one of those shows and then ever after that, they invited usually two artists to show there, and it became a big, important event.

ZL: That was like an annual?

JB: It became an annual thing after that. They had the Rendezvous Show and they would invite artists, usually two artists—a painter and a sculptor—to come there and they had some very important shows, some wonderful shows there, and it was a big event.

ZL: You started to mention this, but when you were living at Five Mile, you decided you'd better take some of your paintings. Nobody was going to come to your door and knock on it so you decided you had to . . .

JB: (Chuckle) Probably nobody really ever, at least in those days, nobody that I knew actually just loaded up their paintings and loaded them up in their truck or car to go down someplace and walk up and knock on a door and say, "I'm an artist." But I did that. There were a lot of wealthy people around in that part of Oklahoma and a lot of people, of course, related to the cowboy. There were a lot of ranchers and a lot of fine livestock. I remember I got a commission to paint a couple of famous bulls for the Brangus Association, Brangus cows and Brangus bulls. My old friend, Joe Crow, who ran the Clear Creek Ranch there in Wells, Oklahoma was responsible for that; and he got me some commissions and I used to go there and help him. He was a great friend and great cowboy and a great roper. I'd go over there and help him and I learned a lot about being a cowboy from him too. He would get me commissions and really saved our bacon several times there when our finances hit a low spot. But the people that first started buying my work were people like that—ranchers. They knew the subject matter, they didn't know too much about art maybe, but they loved the subject matter, even some of my Indian friends. So in the early part of my career, the people that were my early collectors were ranchers and people that really loved and knew the subject matter.

ZL: Along that same line, you went to Fort Worth and met John Justin.



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JB: That's right. Joe De Yong (who we'd met out in California when I went to Art Center School, and who had lived with Charlie Russell for 13 years working on technical advisory work for the movies) had worked for Cecil B. DeMille and he had done the work on movies like "Shane." Joe De Yong was one of the guys who was very instrumental in some of the direction my career took. Another friend I met there at that time was Ben Johnson, the movie actor, who has been a long time friend. He is one of my heroes and always has been; one of the great cowboy actors and one of the really great cowboys—period. Those were probably two guys that were really important to me to get to meet while we were in California. I became friends with both those people and Joe De Yong was very instrumental in directing and coaching Sharon and me on my career.

But back to the question about John Justin—Joe knew John Justin. When we were back in Oklahoma he corresponded all the time and he said, "You should take some of your work down there and show it to John." So I had written to John and Joe had written and introduced me, so on the strength of that I went down there. I had this old station wagon, old Ford station wagon, we loaded it down with paintings and drove down there and John was wonderful. He was just wonderful to me. We did some trading and he bought a couple of things and it was really important. It was an important sale. It was one of the early sales I'd had for multiple paintings and I remember he wrote me out a check there and I didn't actually have enough money to get back home so I had to figure out a way. I didn't want to let him know that, and I had to figure out a way to cash his check because I couldn't get home. So I went into Ryan's Saddle Shop and I didn't want to buy anything because I was wanting to take all the money home, so I ended up buying a pair of Levis and I gave him this check for it. And I didn't know it at the time, but Whistle Ryan was his name, he went over and called John and asked him if the check was all right and of course John told him, but I didn't know that at the time. John told me later. Of course he laughed about that.

ZL: We should identify that John Justin is from Justin Boot Company.

JB: Yeah right, Justin Industries now. He and Jane are great friends and have always been friends of ours ever since and treated me wonderful and was a wonderful man. I think he was at that time the mayor of Forth Worth actually. But he's a great guy, a wonderful Westerner, and at the time, that was a very important sale for me.

ZL: In 1959 or 1960, you decided to come to Phoenix and see what the market was like there.

JB: I had gone to the Western Writers Convention. I've become an associate member of the Western Writers which was all the great writers of that period that wrote all the screen plays for movies and wrote the articles – the serials on *Saturday Evening Post* and what not. I wasn't a writer, but they took



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me in and they knew I was an artist. We went to the conference down at Tucson. That was before we had moved here and Sharon got a little exposed to Arizona. She was starting to like it more and more and more and she saw that the subject matter and the country lent itself to an artist who was creative and wanting to paint the West. Arizona personified all the things that I loved: the cowboy was here, the Indians were here, the beautiful country with places to roam and ride and research and it was a wonderland for me.

I had gone down to Phoenix one time. I had taken some of my drawings by the newspaper there to show them to Reg Manning, the Pulitzer Prize cartoonist. He was very kind and looked at my work and thought it was really good. I mean he was encouraging, but nothing really came of it. I also went by *Arizona Highways*. I showed them my work. Nothing happened then, but later on after we moved out here to Arizona, Raymond Carlson called me and asked me to illustrate some things for the magazine and he'd always been great. He was the guy that was responsible for the success of the *Arizona Highways* magazine, and I think *Arizona Highways*, certainly at that time, was very influential in people looking at Arizona as a place to come to visit, vacation or eventually to live. But Raymond was very dedicated to the artists who helped him in the early days like Ross Santee and then Ted DeGrazia. But finally a time came when he wanted to use some of my stuff and he called me and I was quick to get the work down there to him. Then ever after that, I was one of his guys too that he knew that if he had something that would lend itself to my style, he'd call me. That was an important step for me and a break to get that kind of exposure in a wonderful magazine like *Arizona Highways*. I'll always be grateful for that.

So Arizona has played a really important part in my career. My work has flourished here and been inspired with the subject matter and the people and the collectors that I developed. Had I done this somewhere else, I don't think I would have been as fulfilled as an artist or maybe nobody would even know my name today had it not been for the role and importance that probably Arizona has played in my career.

ZL: Was Walter Bimson of the Valley National Bank the first . . .

JB: Walter Bimson was one of the early collectors of my work. I was in O'Brien's Art Gallery, Art Emporium it was called there in Scottsdale, and I think that Walter Bimson had seen some of my work there originally. Then after I moved here, I wasn't at O'Brien's anymore but he kind of kept track of my work. I remember a really neat story about him and about banking in those days. I called him, we were living in a small house over here in Coffee Pot and I found a piece of property that looked like it would be a good place to build my first studio. Sharon encouraged me to go ahead with the idea but we didn't have any money. So I called him one day and he was, I believe, at a Salt River Project meeting and they said, "We'll tell him and maybe he'll call back." It was important that day for me to make the deal



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because the property I knew wasn't going to last very long. So I told him what I wanted to talk to him about and he said, "Well, can you be down here in a couple hours?" I said, "Yes, sir, I sure can." And so I was down there in his office in a couple hours. I told him what I wanted—that this was a piece of property where I was going to build my studio and explained it to him. He asked me a couple of questions and he sat down and wrote me out a check and just handed it to me. I never signed a piece of paper or anything and he said, "Pay me back when you can." I did pay him back later. (Both chuckle) But that was the kind of guy he was and he was strictly on a personal basis. And then we borrowed some money later for a house and we did business with that bank and he was wonderful to me up until he passed away. But he was one of my early collectors and was one of the great Arizona businessmen.

ZL: Speaking of businessmen, one of the interesting things to me about you is that you have your art, but you early on must have decided you had to be a salesman and a businessman.

JB: Well, I think maybe you're over estimating my part of that. (Chuckle) I think my wife's the businessman. I just paint the pictures. I like people and I've been fortunate enough to, I guess at times, represent myself with my art which I've had to do at times. I don't particularly like—I don't really enjoy that so much; but Sharon has been the one who's taken care of the money. And when we started making a little, why she saw to it that it was invested properly or saved. I don't know what it would have been like if I would have done all this myself. I'd probably be living in a cave somewhere and be deeply in debt besides. (Both chuckle) But she's the business person and she's plenty good at it.

Speaking about collectors in those days, there have been some wonderful people down there, you know the Western Art Associates. When we got involved down there, we met all these wonderful people when they were first forming that group. We'd have these wonderful parties and things and all these people of course enjoyed Western art: Thelma Kieckhefer, Kent and Betty Wasik, and of course, the Goldwaters—Peggy and Barry Goldwater, and the Ryans, and the Libby's—Eleanor Waddell Libby, Scott and Eleanor Libby, John and Marie Sands. And then later, on of course, Eddie Basha who was probably the most aggressive young art collector to come along and set all kinds of rules. In the early days at the RCA show, whoever got there first, bought the art. It wasn't on a draw or anything and Eddie, it was really funny how he would get in there and get people to run and get the art. He's a great guy and one of my dearest friends and as you know, just got the Democratic nomination for Governor and hopefully, will be our next Governor. I know he will.

ZL: Let's back track a little bit here. You were commissioned for covers on *The Cattlemen*.

JB: In the early days when we were living at Five Mile, like I said, there wasn't much exposure for Western art. There weren't all these publications that there are today and the organizations and so forth; and so the only place that you could get anybody who wanted to use any Western art was on cattlemen



or horse magazines like the *Western Horseman* and *The Cattlemen* magazine there at Fort Worth. This gave me great exposure again to the cattlemen and the people that were interested in the art; because like I say, those were the people that associated with Western art because of the subject matter. There were still Russell's and Remington's around that you could buy at that time back in those days, and they weren't all that much money either; so the idea of a contemporary artist doing this was kind of new to everybody and I was the only one that was around.

ZL: You were a pioneer in that time.

JB: There was no other one that I knew of around and there weren't even very many artists around in that part of the country that you knew about; so it was kind of a strange occupation. Like we were talking about Walter Bimson, but most banks you go up to and tell them you're an artist, you get a pretty good chuckle from the banker and he thinks that's fine but what do you do for a living? It was the cattlemen buying the art and they loved the subject matter and were willing to spend a few hundred dollars at times to have a piece to hang up over the fireplace.

ZL: When you decided to move west, how did you pick Sedona over say Santa Fe or Tucson?

JB: Well as I said, we had driven through here, we loved the place and it was kind of a funny story. We had focused on Sedona when we were living in Oklahoma near the little town of Quapaw, Oklahoma, right on the Quapaw Reservation. We had set our sights to move to Sedona the first opportunity that came along. I had sold those few paintings there during the show at the Montana Historical Society and we had this money and my brother came by the house. We lived out in the country and my brother, Ted, had come by the house and he was pulling a U-Haul trailer and he had about a week left on it. He had done some moving and we were sitting there having coffee in the morning. We were sitting at the coffee table out there in the country, and we started talking about Sedona and moving. My brother had this yellow trailer sitting there and Sharon said, "Let's move." So with no more ceremony than what I just said, we got up from this table and started packing our stuff in whatever we could find to put it into, but we didn't have too much. (Chuckle) There wasn't too much to pack. We lived in this great big farm house, a wonderful old house out in the country that some people named Whiteburg's had built. It was an old landmark there on the Quapaw Reservation. It was a nice old house but there wasn't very much of our stuff on the inside of it. But we gathered this stuff up and we loaded it all in this trailer-all within an hour or two's time, and I said goodbye to Sharon. I said, "We'll go out there and find us a place and I'll call you when we get there." She had Tracy there standing beside her and waved us off. We U-turned down the road and headed towards Arizona. Like I say, with not much more ceremony than that.

We got here and we rented a little house. We didn't know anybody in town, and then, of course, I didn't have a job. Well I wasn't looking for one necessarily either; but we made a trip back and got Sharon and



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we moved to Sedona. It seemed like a lark or a hurried decision but we'd thought about it a long time. The only thing that happened in a hurry was that moment when we decided the opportunity was there. Well my brother had a week left on that U-Haul trailer after all. But that's how we come to town.

ZL: You always read about artists saying that the light in Santa Fe is just right. Is that true of Sedona?

JB: Well, Sedona is a wonderful place. It's so beautiful here. When I first moved here, it was a **long** time before I could use it in paintings and I still don't use it a lot; but I use the region around here of course. It was almost overpowering and intimidating, but the light is wonderful here. In fact, the light's so good that I have to kind of diffuse it in my studio and I use artificial light now. But this is wonderful light, very inspiring. Another thing that's wonderful about Sedona for a painter especially is that you can travel within fifty miles of here and the country changes radically and so you get a feel of different places. You get the high mountains and the pine trees or you can get plains or desert and cactus or you can find a multitude of backgrounds and landscapes to use.

ZL: Who was your greatest role model in painting?

JB: Well, I'd have to say probably Charlie Russell. He was such a great man, great artist and so many talents and was such a great person that he would have probably been a great guy, great man even if he couldn't paint. He was a writer and he was probably one of the first cowboy poets and he wrote stories, wrote books, was a great humorist, was a great painter, great sculptor and he did it all and took it in his stride. He was a wonderful man and he never let it blow him out of perspective as a human being; and I guess I'd have to say that he was probably my idol as an artist. Then I've been influenced by other artists of course and all kinds of art. I've tried to look when we've traveled abroad and all over the country and gone to museums and I've tried to see what someone did right or what I enjoyed in their work and tried to learn from it and apply it to my own. I consider myself a perpetual student about my art and about the cowboy—the subject too. I consider myself a student on all those things and I'm learning things every day.

ZL: Would you describe the various mediums that you use?

JB: I worked at first—my important efforts were oil painting. Of course in my early days in my youth and growing up, I drew. That, of course, was the easiest thing. You could always find a pencil and so I drew a lot and I drew all the time and of course that's always served me well, my ability to draw and my draftsmanship. Later on, I started working color, finding out about color, and this was, of course, oil. And then I also work in pastel. I've worked in water color and as I said, I never studied sculpture formally. But after we'd been out here, I had become good friends with George Phippen from Prescott who was one of the only cowboy artists that I knew of and he was doing sculpture. He was one of the



early sculptors actually. He gave me some clay. I was over there one day and he said, “You can do this.” He said, “You’ve got the ability to draw and everything.” He said, “You can do this.” He said, “Take this clay home and try it.” And so I brought it home and the first thing I did was that Navajo head there and that was the first piece of sculpture I ever tried.

ZL: That was the first one?

JB: Uh-huh. It became a very popular piece for me and it opened my eyes to a new medium. And of course I’ve been working in that medium ever since. So my two major mediums are oil painting and the sculpture—the clay. People ask sometimes which do I like better and I would have to say I like one as good as the other. I love to be able to express myself and it’s rewarding to be able to work at one for a while and then if you get bored or tired with it or it gets to fightin’ back for whatever reason, why you can go to the other and then go back fresh, so that’s the way I work. And my studio is built where I can have a drawing going on, a couple of paintings, a sculpture or two so I work on maybe four or five things at the same time and even maybe illustrate a book in the middle of it.

ZL: Does a painting take on a life of its own?

JB: Well sometimes a sculpture takes on a life of its own. Sculpture is—there’s time when the clay has to speak to you almost when you’re working and sometimes to me, these figures I’m working on, take on personalities. Painting—you know you’re dealing with another process and you’re thinking more in terms of light or color and values and different things; but sometimes with sculpture, you’re dealing strictly with the personality that evolves or will evolve while you’re working on it and they take on their own kind of a personality or life.

ZL: As you’re getting ready to do a painting, do you sketch it out first?

JB: Sometimes I do thumbnails and sometimes I’ll just start drawing right on the canvas, but I have the ability somehow or another to close my eyes and see these things. I can think of what I want to do and a lot of times I stew or worry or think or whatever you want to call it for a long time before I do something; but once it gels in my mind, once all these things fit together and the idea flows in my mind, then it seems like just a simple matter of sitting down and mechanically drawing it out. I draw most of these things out of my head. Sometimes if I get stuck on something, I’ll go to a photograph or something to get a perspective or sometimes backgrounds and things like that. But a lot of the things I do come right out of my head and I sit down and draw those freehand right on the canvas.

ZL: But it’s been planned in your mind.



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JB: In my mind, yeah. I have it in my mind first and then it's just a matter of simply the mechanical part of putting it down, drawing it out of my head what I already see in my mind's eye.

ZL: And you pay a great deal of attention to detail. When you do a Navajo, he looks like a Navajo. When you do an Apache, he looks like an Apache. And the same thing when you switch centuries, in the 19th century it's very evident and 20th century cowboys, if they're in Arizona, they look like Arizona cowboys. They may be subtle differences to a casual observer, but they're pretty important.

JB: That's right. That's a good observation on your part. I am very much aware of that. It's like an Indian sitting on a horse. He "sits" a horse different than an Anglo does. The horse and the period—if I was doing a trail drive scene that was in 1870, the size of the horse, it would look totally different than a modern quarter horse than I'd put a cowboy on today. All of those are things that you have to be aware of. It's not simply just the way they're dressed. They were different people. They dressed different, some of those people a long time ago were a little slighter, slimmer, and their clothes were different. When you're dealing with Indian subjects, not only is the dress different but the features were different. So you know different tribes—some were taller, some were shorter and wider and certainly their dress was different. All those are things that you have to be aware of and you try to get that in there subtly without it just looking like—you're not trying to make it look like something to be put into a catalog to show how people dressed or to be so mechanical.

ZL: What is your opinion of the Revisionist Theory of western history?

JB: Oh, it gives me a pain really. I think for someone to go back 150 years and try to re-write how things were then is very difficult. It's very difficult and fool-hearted I think sometimes. I've read some of the things that have been done on that, like I think it was the Smithsonian. They took a bunch of Western art around, borrowed things from Gilcrease and the Cowboy Hall of Fame, bought the old Remington's and Russell's and they took them back there and wrote a catalog inserting all this nonsense about what they're doing there and what they were thinking about when they painted this. I read that and it was the biggest bunch of nonsense I ever saw. That's when I really realized that somebody was out of whack with that whole theory because I think I understood what made those guys tick and I can go back and envision the period of time they were in and it's totally nonsense what the author of that particular catalog wrote. And to go back and try to say what was in somebody's mind when they did something 150 years ago and try to re-write that is unbelievable to me. We see it now in the historical documents and the whole perception of our history, and you see it coming out in a lot of movies and a lot of entertainment today too.

ZL: It doesn't seem that you use women in your paintings or sculptures very often.



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JB: You know you're right. I don't do a lot of women. I don't really draw women and paint women that well. I love to get a lot of character in things and I have a tendency sometime to get . . . I was taught in school when I went to Art Center School, they had all these high fashion artisan stuff that you left all that out in order to get a beautiful woman or a stylish woman. You left out the things that I liked to put in, and I like to put the wrinkles in and the character and the used look and everything, and that's one of the reasons why I haven't.

ZL: Think American women are too vain for you to paint? (laughter)

JB: Well no, I love women. I love to look at a beautiful woman and I love all the wonderful things that they are, but to use them in my painting, I haven't. I'll tell you a funny story. Sharon and our daughter Tracy, who is a sculptor, had a show here at a more or less contemporary gallery and the gallery owner wanted me to be in the show. But he wanted me to create a sculpture that wasn't Western art. So I thought about what the heck I would do because that's the way I think. And I remember that I had a sketch that I'd made. We were at the Tate Museum in London and I observed this old Englishman come in and stand in front of the statue of this naked figure, a wonderful young woman. I got to watching him and he stood there, he hadn't even taken his hat off and he had an overcoat on. He stood there for the longest time and he got this look on his face. He stood there for half an hour and I finally just sat down and watched him and so I did a sketch of this when we got back to the hotel. I remembered that sketch and I thought what a neat idea for a sculpture is to have this man stand there and this figure up on a pedestal and I decided to have this be Eve holding an apple out. I even came up with a title and I was going to title it "Fascination." I put the old gentleman there with a cane and his hat off and everything, but when I decided to do this, I was going to have to have a model. I finally convinced Sharon of that because like the question you asked, I really don't do women all that much and that well, often times. And so she agreed and I got a model here that had done some modeling to come to the studio; she was a professional. But Sharon, it was so funny, she would come out there. She was in my studio every five minutes because I had this pretty naked girl running around my studio and Sharon had all sorts of things conjured up in her mind, I guess. But I had to assure her that I was out there drawing. But after doing a lot of studies and drawing and everything, I did create this sculpture that turned out to be very well received and everything. That was one of the few times Sharon told me that it's fine for me to paint naked horses or I could paint naked cowboys, but if I was going to paint any naked girls, it was going to have to be from my memory. (Laughter by both)

ZL: As you've grown in your craft, have your opinions about art changed?

JB: Well I certainly hope that I've grown. Sharon says, and some of my close friends and collectors say, that my work is getting better. I look, I study all the time. I try to learn from the last thing that I did and I feel like that my work has blossomed here in the last few years. Things are easier for me, some of my



concepts I can carry them off without any frustration, things I want to do. I feel like I've matured as a sculptor and I certainly feel like I've matured as a painter. I get more aware of time and things like that. I get to where I'm more conscious of doing things that I want to do, subjects that I really want to do and sizes that I want to do. I think I'm at a point to where I need to think about creating my—trying to do my very best work and try to do things that I enjoy and I'm having fun with and make the statements that I want to make rather than what I think might be popular or what might be acceptable or commercial. I really have never thought much that way, I've always done that. I've done the things that I wanted to do and fortunately, in most cases, they've been things that other people, the collectors have enjoyed. But as I get older, the more I think about it, I get to where I want to do the things I want to do, and the wonderful thing of it is, as long as you keep your health and your eyesight, the Lord willing, you go on. I'm able to do those things and I'm as enthusiastic right now about my work that I'm doing as I've ever been in my life.

ZL: About how many paintings and sculptures do you complete a year?

JB: I probably do three sculptures - I'll average three new subjects in sculpture a year and probably ten major paintings. My major, I mean good size. But I work pretty freely and it seems like I create a lot of stuff. Out there in my studio, I was telling you, I think there were four oil paintings going on, two sculptures and I did thirty-five drawings for a book—all at the same time. I mean they were all going on at the same time.

ZL: That must be nice to be able to switch.

JB: A lot of artists start to work on a piece and they have to kind of start on it and finish it and stay focused on that particular piece. There's nothing wrong with that, however, whatever it takes, but it seems like for me, I go at my work with a lot of enthusiasm and a lot of passion and I have to feel that way at that moment about that piece and if I don't, I get away from it. I don't know if I could sustain that day after day, week after week just on one piece. I go to work on this one and then I feel like I want to go work on that one. And you keep enthusiastic and fresh that way. I do anyway.

ZL: Do you remember what your first painting sold for?

JB: I really don't, but I was selling paintings when I was sixteen years old and they'd be like sixty-five dollars, fifty dollars or so.

ZL: And your first thousand dollar was sold here in Sedona.

JB: The first painting I ever sold for a thousand dollars was sold right here. A lady named Mrs. Metcalf.



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She was a wealthy lady from California; I believe she was a Huntington. My work was down here at La Galleria where Al Nestler ran the gallery and I had some work hanging in there. I had a show, and she lived here. She had a home here, one of many homes, and she came in the gallery to see my show and bought the painting. It was the most expensive painting there; it was a thousand dollars. When she did it, afterwards I thought oh no, she was an older lady and I thought she probably didn't see that one zero on there. So I went and mentioned that to her and she almost took offense to the fact and she said, "I saw the price young man." But that was the first time I ever sold a painting for four figures. We delivered the painting to her. I remember it was kind of funny. Al had me take the painting over there to her and she had a big nice home here. I went in there and she asked the help to leave the room and I delivered the painting. She got up out of the couch or chair that she was sitting on and she had her little purse underneath there and she had this money in the purse—cash. It was so funny, I didn't even know her, and there she has her help leave and then stands there in front of me. It was really a big moment for me and that was one of the benchmark points of my career, the first time I got a thousand dollars.

ZL: You know the world is changing so rapidly in the world of the subjects you paint; the twentieth century is also changing. What do you see when you look in the future for both the cowboys and the Native American people?

JB: Well I get a little saddened to think about it - the cowboy and the American Indian both are people that care a great deal about tradition. I know there's other people in our society that feel that way too, but I know about those people and they both care about tradition and take great pride in doing things the right way and practicing their religion. In the case of the Native American or in the case of the cowboys, taking care of the land and doing things like his grandfather did and doing a good job, taking care of his animals, raising good livestock and everything. Today I see an assault on that lifestyle by our government and by our society that doesn't seem to understand that or doesn't seem to think that those values and traditions are very important. It's disturbing to me to see that and I don't know how long this assault will last or how long the industry will withstand this assault. But there definitely are some strange things happening and coming out of Washington on that subject. I feel like the cowboy and the ranch as we know it today, could be a thing of the past in the very near future. And what's awful, it seems like in our country where medicine and agriculture, feeding our people, those are two areas where we've always, no matter what else has happened, have always seemed like they've withstood and we've always really shined at that. Those industries have always done well for us and we've always been in the forefront. Now then they seem to be attacking healthcare and medicine isn't as good as it used to be and food - we've always raised the best food - fed the rest of the world and it's been inexpensive by comparison. They're trying to tweak that in Washington and it's very disturbing to me. And I'm not just saying that as an artist, I'm saying that as a citizen.

ZL: Let's talk about your bronze sculptures. Do you use petroleum wax in clay?



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JB: Usually my sculptures - the originals - are done in clay. It goes through a process where waxes are made. It's a petroleum product but my originals are clay.

ZL: And then it's cast in limited editions of usually twenty to thirty?

JB: Twenty, depending on the subject and size, I've done as few as fifteen and as many as fifty.

ZL: You mentioned that you had done some monuments?

JB: I've done two monuments to date; those are pieces that go outside in a park or in a garden or something. Both of these are subjects that I've done in small versions, they would sit on a table and then later on I did the monuments. One of them was "Night Song" and that's the flute player, the Southern Plains warrior playing a cording flute. The other one is "Thanks for the Rain," that has been a very popular piece for me. One of them is in the park down in Wickenburg, one of them is up in Willow Rock Museum in Bartlesville, Oklahoma and the other one is at the L.D. Brinkman Corporate Headquarters in Kerrville, Texas. Of course Brink was the one that commissioned the piece in the first place, so there's three "Thanks for the Rain" and then the "Night Song" -there were nine of those cast. I'm working on one right now that's life size called "Nature's Children" which is an Indian surrounded by small animals and his hands uplifted and he's got a bird sitting on his finger. I'm working on that right now and it should be finished this fall or this winter.

ZL: Let's talk about your work as a book illustrator. Did you first illustrate books in Oklahoma?

JB: The first real job commission in any commercial sort of way was by the University of Oklahoma Press. I had taken a portfolio down there after I left Art Center School and I showed it to Savoie Lottinville who was the director of the Press and he thought enough of the portfolio that he asked me to do like three or four books right on the spot. This was important to me at the time because we were living there on Five Mile and there weren't very many checks coming in. I was just trying to sell an original painting and had no connections with any publications or anything; so getting those checks on occasion, as small as they were, was pretty important. I've always enjoyed books, especially books on western history or the modern cowboy or western things and so I did some books later with Knauff, Grossett & Dunlap. I did a youth series for Grossett & Dunlap that S. Omar Barker wrote under a pen name. He was one of the early cowboy poets from New Mexico. He wrote under the pen name of Dan Scott. But then after we moved out here, I did a lot of work. Paul Weaver was a dear friend or is a dear friend - the guy that started Northland Press in Flagstaff. I did a lot of work with Northland Press and then I've done works with the University of Arizona Press, University of Nebraska, Mountain Press up in Missoula. I've probably been involved -there are three books on my work-but not counting those,



I've *probably* been involved with sixty or more books.

ZL: And what about Don Hedgpeth?

JB: Well Don Hedgpeth is more or less considered my - besides being a dear friend, he's my biographer. He did my biography, the book called *Cowboy Artist. the Joe Beeler Story*. Don and I met years ago, he was actually teaching school at that time in Kerrville. He had rodeoed and cowboyed around and finally settled down and was teaching school. He wrote to me and we started corresponding and that was probably thirty-five years ago. We've been friends ever since and Don has since become one of the premier writers and authors on the American West and we still see them every chance we get. Don and Sugar are dear friends.

ZL: You illustrated books for Dr. Ben K. Green who wrote books such as *The Last Cattle Drive Through Downtown Dallas*. He was a veterinarian and I gather a real character.

JB: Ben was one of the real genuine characters. I first met Ben through Paul Weaver at Northland Press. Ben was having his books done at Knauff back in New York or Philadelphia, I've forgotten the headquarters, but Ben had decided that Northland was going to do some of his books and he wanted me to illustrate them. I had never met him before. I had found out that he was a peculiar sort of a guy and that he was difficult to work with; but I just fell in love with him when we met. He was a neat guy and had cowboyed and punched cows and traded horses all over the western part of the United States and Mexico and he was a genuine character. I loved working on those books with him and of course I never go anywhere today that if any of my books are mentioned, there's always somebody that mentions those Ben K. Green books. He had a great following. He was a neat guy. He would travel along in his car. He had a white Dodge car and he had the dust jackets plastered up all over the windows inside the car so you didn't have any doubt what he was or what he did when he drove up. But he'd drive up to get a tank of gas and before he got out of there, he'd have sold the guy from the gas station two or three books. He was a great promoter and he could publish a book and sell almost the whole edition himself. He was a neat guy.

ZL: The latest book, or at least the latest book I've read about that you illustrated, was *Cattle, Horses, Sky and Grass* which was edited by Warren Miller, Prescott. It's a book of poetry by late twentieth century cowboys and cowgirls. Was that a challenge since you had so many different authors?

JB: Well it was a fun thing to illustrate. That book came about - I was up in Northland Press one day visiting about some other matters and of course cowboy poetry in the last few years has become very popular and there's very little written about it. Different authors had come out with small paperback type publications and little, pretty insignificant type of publications and I was talking up there to the editor



one day and saying that I thought that the cowboy poetry had kind of come into its own. It looked like it was about time that somebody came out with a nice library type hard cover book with some of the best of the best poets. It had really matured into an honest to goodness American literature. They were in agreement, but they didn't know much about the poetry or who might do it. I suggested Warren Miller, he's the Folklorist here in Arizona, who had been very active in the cowboy poetry gatherings here in Arizona and up in Elko and other places. So I called him and I got Northland and him together and the book kind of evolved. It was a fun book for me to work on and to do the illustrations. It was a challenge because you had different poems: some were light, some were heavy, some of them were humorous, and then you had different poets. So what I tried to do was handle the illustrations like maybe several different artists did it. I tried to change my styles, I did one in pencil and one in pen and ink and some in wash and so it was kind of a challenge; but I handled it that way. It was really a fun book to work on and it's been very popular.

ZL: You've illustrated books by Mike McFarland who wrote *Never Walk When You Can Ride*, a book on cowboy folklore; and a book for Stella Hughes, *The Hashknife Cowboy*.

JB: Those were both fun books too. I, of course, know Stella, and have known her for years, and Mack Hughes, Stella's husband; and I am great admirers of both of them. Then I've punched cows and roped with her son and grandsons and I know the whole family: Mike and Skeeter and Patty and all the boys, Bob and Pat and John. So it was really fun for me to do those books with her, and the *Hashknife Cowboy* was one that I think the University of Arizona finally published. It won an award as the best nonfiction western book done that year, voted on by the Western Writers of America. Stella and I were both very happy about that. Then of course Mike Hughes is a dear friend of mine, a great cowpuncher and a talented sculptor himself. He lives now with his family, is running a ranch down south of Cherry here. But Mike put together this book. It was a collection of some of his own stories and recollections plus a little diary that he had been given and so that was an accumulation of all these stories. It's a great little book on some great cowboy stories of this Central and Northern Arizona cow country.

ZL: Now when you illustrate a book, does the author give you the text and then you decide what to do with it, or how do you go about that?

JB: I work a different way. Sometimes we'll figure out if it's a book—like you figure that maybe each chapter deserves to have illustrations so that it looks nice and it kind of flows. In the case of the poetry book, there you had twenty-eight poets. I felt to be fair, each one should have one poem illustrated. But in the case of a book like Mike's, we kind of talked it over and we exchanged ideas and notions and what he thought and it was left up finally to me. Most of the time you'll pick out the incident that seems like the most likely thing to be illustrated with the most action or where it's the funniest or the most dramatic and have that to be what you illustrate in that particular chapter. But you're also aware that you



want to have these things sprinkled in the book so that's it's even, and that you don't have all the drawings on one end, or the other, or the middle. But usually you work that out with the author, or in some cases the art director will tell you what they want, and then you'll have to work that out with the art director.

ZL: Now you've also gotten into lithographs.

JB: Yes, I've done some stone lithographs. I mentioned before, Alexandre Hogue, when I first went away to school when I went to Tulsa University. He taught lithography and that was a medium that he enjoyed and I learned because I liked to draw so much. It was a natural thing for me to kind of go to that. I learned about it and later on, I did some of the Tamarind Institute from the University of New Mexico; and with a publisher in New York, one of the old time publishers Burr Miller and Sons, who had done a lot of the stone lithographs for some of the early artists back in the turn of the century and in the twenties. So I have done a few lithographs and enjoy that. I'm right now looking at maybe doing some etchings which I haven't done before.

ZL: When you were only thirty-three years old, you had the first one man painting show at the newly opened National Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City and your heroes, Frederick Remington and Charles M. Russell were featured there. Was that a highlight for you?

JB: It certainly was. That along with having the first show at the Gilcrease Museum was two of the highlights of my life and my career. The Cowboy Hall of Fame had just opened. The headquarters were at the Skirvin Hotel. They didn't have a building yet when the hall was first formed, and Dean Krakel went there to be the director. So it was several years before the museum was actually finished and they moved from the Skirvin Hotel down there into the hall.

ZL: You were talking about your show at the Hall of Fame.

JB: What's interesting about that, the follow-up to my show at the Hall of Fame was when we came back to Arizona we were forming the Cowboy Artists about that time. I went back to Oklahoma City and talked to Dean about that as John Hampton did later too. They thought it would be a great idea to have our group there to have our annual show at the hall. So this was a great coming together of the two. There was a need for the Hall to have some activity that brought people in there. It was a newly formed organization even though they had this wonderful collection of Russell's and Remington's, but they still needed to have some function there. So our annual show there brought people in. It was an event, and awards were given, and banquets and seminars so it was a wonderful marriage of these two new organizations. Our show was held there for seven years. We ran into difficulty then with Dean and we left there and of course brought our show to Phoenix.



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ZL: You had a one man exhibit at the Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center in Oklahoma City in 1965. I guess that was the first exhibit by a living artist.

JB: Yes it was. The museum had been just been formed and I was the first artist to have a one man show there and that was a great privilege and an honor to be chosen such. It was a successful show. We had a good turnout and it gave my career a great boost at that time.

ZL: The Cowboy Artists of America is a vastly successful organization that was started by you and a few of your friends and you've just mentioned that. Had you begun to dream about that organization for Cowboy Artists?

JB: Had I dreamed about it? No it really wasn't something that I'd sit around and ponder about or think about. Actually what we did, Charlie Dye and John Hampton and I went on a trip down to Magdalena, Mexico to help a friend of John Hampton's work some cattle and just be down there and have a good time and ride for a few days. On the way down there we got to talking about artists who were doing what we did or what we do, whether or not they like to get out and ride, and were there any actual guys who did this that were cowboys. After we got into this camp, we talked about it some more. George Phippen, who wasn't with us, was a mutual friend and had a successful career already and was living in Prescott. We thought when we got back home, we'd get George and get together and talk about this and see if there was anybody else out there who might be interested in forming some sort of a group; getting together on occasions and riding and talking about our art and maybe painting together or whatever.

So as the organization and the thoughts came more and more together, then it went from being like the concept of a social group to being more on an academic level. The idea of a show came into the plan and so we realized that if there is going to be a show, then it's got to be based more on academic qualifications along with your background and your subject matter, besides just being a good guy and knowing how to ride a horse. From that point on, the membership was based on the fact that you did cowboys and those kinds of subject matter, but you also were a professional artist who could show in a show of a high level.

But the organization took right off, and we found that there were artists—Fred Harman was a well known artist who had done Red Ryder and there were other artists around who were starting to make a living at painting Western art. Then there were artists like Charlie who had already almost had a career in illustration and was in semi-retirement. He had moved from the East and still he wanted to paint and was doing cowboy subject matter and had a career in another field almost. So it didn't take us long to get ten or twelve artists together and our first show at the Hall of Fame evolved from that. It went on, our following grew, the collectors came to the show, and it wasn't too long that our show was the one that



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everybody looked to, to find a good professional level of cowboy and Western art being done. That was twenty-nine years ago, and we're going into our thirtieth year next year, and we still have a wonderful following.

ZL: George Phippen died in 1966.

JB: George Phippen, the poor guy, rest his soul, he was the neatest guy, a great artist and he just didn't live long enough to really see him bloom. He was doing great art then, but he would have been doing greater art now and was just feeling his way into doing some great sculpture. He was a leader and a guy that loved the cowboy and was one of the founders with us in the group and was the first president.

ZL: And then Charlie Dye died in 1973.

JB: Charlie was a neat guy. He was a good artist, a great artist, a great personality, and he was great in counsel. When we were getting this thing started with our negotiations back with the Hall, and going through some of the tough times that we had in some negotiations, Charlie was good counsel. He had a good head on his shoulders, loved Western art and had a distinguished career. He was a very well trained artist and was one of the other genuine characters in the Western art field.

ZL: How does an individual become a member of the Cowboy Artists?

JB: Well, we have a set of rules. Most of the time, the artists apply. Then we have a screening committee that looks at their work and then if they're voted on to appear at our membership meeting in Phoenix in the fall, they bring five original pieces. We look at those things and then the membership votes on them. And in some cases, we have known about the artist, followed their work along and they've been invited in. Most of the time there has been from twenty-five to thirty members. I've been asked if we have a set number, but we don't. That's just the way it's been. We don't have a number that we shoot for or anything like that. But you are required to be a professional and of course on a high level.

ZL: You mentioned that you moved to Phoenix. That was in 1973?

JB: To Phoenix?

ZL: The Cowboy Artists Show.

JB: I'm not very good with dates.



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ZL: I think it was.

JB: Is that when it was? We were at the Hall for seven years. We brought the show to Phoenix.

ZL: Thelma Kieckhefer was in large part responsible for that.

JB: We had made friends with the Western Art Associates. Sharon and I were early members when that group was formed.

ZL: Why don't you tell about that group?

JB: Well the Western Art Associates were a group of people in the Phoenix/Scottsdale/Paradise Valley area that loved Western art and had collected it. They formed this organization to be a part of the Phoenix Art Museum to try to get more western art representation into the Phoenix Art Museum. The group grew and grew and grew and has grown, along with the social activities. They're really genuinely interested in the Western art. And in the early days when we started the CA and would go back there at the Hall, there would always be those shining, laughing faces there at our show. You could always count on an airplane load or two of the Phoenix people to be there and they were the nucleus really in the early days of the Western art collecting. They were always there, and they were the group who were instrumental when we had the difficulty with the Hall and left there. I gave them a call and in fact Thelma Kieckhefer came up here and we sat in our living room here and discussed the future of CA. She said, "We're going to sponsor it and bring it here and we need to show we'd love to have the show here." We never dropped a stitch. We came right here and with the help of Thelma and the rest of the enthusiastic group of Western Art Associates, they got the Men's Art Council, that group of the young businessmen there who are part of the Phoenix Art Museum, to actually do the nuts and bolts and mechanics of getting the show there and working with us in making the show successful. That happened and we've have a wonderful relationship with the Men's Art Council.

ZL: In 1990, you won a gold medal and a Best of Show for the bronze sculpture, "A Chief Goes to Washington." That happened to be the twenty-fifth anniversary of the CA show too. Would you describe that sculpture?

JB: Well it's an old, obviously an elder of his tribe, a spokesperson. Those old leaders, those chiefs were brought back to Washington in the very early days to council with the President usually or someone in high office to try to get them to go on the reservation or to quit the fighting or whatever it is that they were trying to get them to do. But this old chief is one of those guys. He's obviously a Northern Plains Indian and what they would do is take them back there and try to show off what the white man had accomplished. Our presidents at that time were wearing those high hats like President Lincoln and they loved those hats. So I've got my old chief sitting there with one of those high hats on and he's been



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given a peace medal. He's got the medal around his neck and he's sitting there in a chair, reared back, very proud with his head turned upward with a walking stick in his hand in an attitude like he's just talked to the President or he's just going to talk to him. I think the success of the piece is that attitude. He has an air about him that comes off when you see him; but he's obviously very proud. Now he might go right back and pick up a rifle or a bow and go to war, but for the moment, he was convinced that he was important and that he'd been back there to talk to the Great White Father.

ZL: In 1993, your bronze sculpture, "Speaker of the House" took a gold medal.

JB: Yes, it was interesting the way that piece evolved. I had one piece of sculpture left to do for the CA show and I hadn't started it yet. I went over to the foundry in Prescott to the bronze smith, to my friend Ed Riley, and I was supposed to pick up a piece that he was working on the patina: it was a finished sculpture. Larry Yazzie, a Navajo artist was over there and he was working on a piece of his too. This was 5:00 or 6:00 o'clock in the evening, and it's getting late, and Ed's running behind. So I'm sitting in there in a half dark room in the foundry waiting on this piece. There's some clay there and I just start working with this clay out of boredom and that piece, "Speaker of the House" actually evolved with me sitting in there in the half dark. I had no tools, just working with my fingers, and after an hour and a half or two hours of waiting, Ed came in there with my piece that he'd been working on the patina for and he looked at that and he said, "My gosh, take that home and finish it." He said, "That's a great start, a great face." And so I literally had that face done. I didn't have the hair and of course some of the details like the bear-claw necklace; so I brought it home and I did those things but the face, the character was established that night. So a lot of times people ask how you get the inspiration. That piece just evolved and I can't tell you any more than that. The clay just spoke to me, that character just came out of the half darkness to me and it was fun. I had a good time with it. It was a neat thing and the piece was obviously very popular. It won the gold medal and the Best of Show.

ZL: Who makes the decisions on the awards for the CAA?

JB: We have a panel of judges that come each year. There are usually three. We try to get one that knows something about sculpture and somebody that knows something about painting and a lot of times they're from different walks: they may be a museum director, another artist, or whatever, but we try to get qualified people.

ZL: In the Cowboy Artists of America, you've been very active. You've served as treasurer, vice president, two terms as president, and currently you're one of two directors. You've been a real salesman and businessman for this group. What kind of responsibilities do you have as director?



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JB: Well I go to meetings that any director goes where policy is considered for that year. Then we have a museum down in Kerrville, which we have some input. So there are usually lots of things to discuss—some years more than others.

ZL: There's been at least one woman who is a member of the CAA. Do you remember who that was?

JB: No, there's never been an artist member.

ZL: There wasn't? I didn't find a name, maybe that's why.

JB: No, there never has been a woman that's qualified that's applied. There have been some women, but membership is based on the quality of their work, and so far there hasn't been one qualified woman apply.

ZL: It was interesting to read about the different methods of payment that have evolved at the CA show. In the beginning, apparently there was a lot of bartering that went on for works; and then eventually it came about that people would pay fifty percent down and then arrange to pay later.

JB: Usually at our show, it's pretty much cut and dried. The price is on there and they either bought them or they didn't buy them. But now then the rules are that they pay half down and half when the show comes down and the works are sent to them. It used to be in the early days it was a lot harder for some of the guys to get home if they didn't sell something during the show. (Chuckle) That's not so much the case now.

ZL: In 1980, the show had total sales of one million, four hundred and eighty-eight thousand. Apparently that was a milestone because you passed the million dollars mark.

JB: Yeah. See we'd never set any goals about anything. A lot of people think the organization was set up like some sort of protective union or whatever, and it's never been that way. The people that have come in there, whose works are looked at, are looked at strictly on the strength of their work. We've never tried to bring anybody in or keep anybody out on any manipulation of anyone's career. It does seem that once you get in there and put that CA after your name, it does change the economics of your work. That seems to be true, but that isn't what we set out to do. We didn't know that would happen. We weren't that smart to have all that figured out. (Chuckle) But I will say this; I think a lot of people don't understand that the spin-offs of the CA organization have been that if you didn't paint non-objective or kind of modern art, you couldn't get in the show. They didn't want any kind of representational art. And one of the things that rode in more or less on CA's coattails was realism and representational art. More shows became popular where it was either Western art or representational. So the strength and success



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of our show bolstered other kinds of art in our country. The CA has probably been one of the most influential art groups in America today. I can't be so immodest and sit here and say forever—but it has been for our recollection, one of the most influential groups in the country, and it's lasted a pretty long time.

ZL: You mentioned a museum in Kerrville, Texas. Would you tell how that got started?

JB: There was a group of businessmen in Kerrville who thought it would be a good idea to have the CA have their headquarters and museum there. I was not in on that right from the beginning because I was campaigning to have a CA museum in Arizona where I felt like it should be; but when those men came and talked to a group of our guys, it was just like how big, and what color. I hadn't even got to the point where anybody was asking how big and so Bill Roden and John Duncan, L.D. Brinkman, Bobby Shelton—those were some of the main guys that came and talked to us. Roden gave the property and the rest of the guys got in there and raised the money and built us a beautiful museum there. That's where the museum is today and we have a research library there, we have annual shows, and there are workshops where we work with young artists. It's a wonderful, wonderful museum and we're all very happy and pleased about that. We just lost Bobby Shelton; he died this last year unfortunately, at a pretty young age. L.D. Brinkman's offices are there, he lives there, and he's still active in it. The museum is healthy and going good.

ZL: Every year the CAA has a trail ride after the annual exhibit. This sounds like a really fun event.

JB: We have a great time. The whole concept about the CA started with us sitting around a campfire talking about it on a roundup; so a very important part of the concept of CA is having a ride and a get together. This is probably the glue and the bonding that's kept our group together all these years and formed this family-like atmosphere that our group has. It's different than any other group, I think, and part of it is because of that. Once a year we get together and go out and ride and relax and talk about our art and visit with one another and have a good time. We've had some great rides. We've been on some of the great ranches in this country, on ranches you just don't get on ordinarily. We've gone from having rides just for fun and just riding around looking at the country to where we actually go on a ranch where they're branding or working cattle and then there's some of us that rope and some would get together and have a roping, but it's always a good time and we've been on some beautiful ranches.

ZL: Usually this is after the CA show?

JB: Well it's in the summertime usually. The CA show's in the fall. Now what you might be talking about or addressing is that some years after the show, a bunch of us take off and go someplace. We've done that before. We've gone off just to relax because everybody works so hard through the show. See



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we have a week down there: meetings, meeting people, talking, visiting and then the show. There's a lot of pressure and so a lot of times the guys want to get away afterwards. We've gone to Hawaii a couple of times. We even went to Tahiti once and have taken some trips down to Mexico. The interesting thing about CA is the guys are genuinely interested in one another, their work, their lives, their friends. I think that's one of the wonderful things about our group.

ZL: It's a very supportive group.

JB: Yeah, it really is. And we have more in common than just our art.

ZL: Well I noticed according to the CA catalogs, they talk about the trail rides in there and you've gone to Texas, Nevada and California.

JB: We just got back. We were on the Hearst Ranch, where the Hearst Castle is at San Simeon. I think they told us we're only the third group of people that have ever been on there like that in all these years.

ZL: Have you ever gone on a trail ride in Arizona?

JB: Oh sure. Oh yeah. Up on the rim, Chilson's place over there. About every state—we've been in New Mexico, Texas, Nevada, California, Montana, Wyoming, maybe not Utah, I'm not sure. But we've been on some great ranches: Four Sixes, 0 Sixes. Rode some good horses, really seen some good remudas and some great cattle.

ZL: And apparently they have wonderful food for you on these trips.

JB: Oh yeah. We were up at the Sleeping Indian Ranch at Ridgeway, Colorado a couple of years ago. They had the crew in there whose wagon had won that big "Chuck Wagon Cook-off" that they had back at the Hall. It was wonderful, the most wonderful food that you can imagine. We've gone where we've had to do our own cooking. One year, Tom Watson and I did all the cooking.

ZL: For the whole group?

JB: For the whole group. We only did that once. We got up there in Big Sandy, Montana which you always think of that being cool; but they were having one of those draughty kinds of years and it was one hundred and three up there. We were humped up over that fire all the time and we were give out when we got home. We had fun. We fixed some pretty good meals.

ZL: Sometimes the group takes along their art supplies and they paint or sketch on these trips?



JB: Oh yeah, a lot of the guys paint. Everybody doesn't rope and do everything, but some guys ride and some guys rope and some places we go fishing. We've got some good fly fishermen. A lot of guys will take their easel if it's in a real pretty spot and paint. Although that isn't work, that's kind of fun. Most artists consider that kind of fun so they're really not working; they're just kind of having fun doing that.

ZL: Is there jealousy in this group?

JB: Well if there is, it's not very evident. It's not an issue. I think that everybody's generally glad when somebody gets an award. I'm sure that everybody feels like there's times when they deserve one and they don't get one, and other times they probably feel lucky if they got one. But usually almost everyone is glad to see someone do well and is quick to get up and go congratulate your friend for winning something in a category that you were in maybe. The guys are really good about that and if there's any serious jealousy there, it really doesn't show.

ZL: One of your artist friends I'd like you to talk about is Frank Polk.

JB: Oh mercy. Frank's my buddy. Frank should be one of the state's treasures. He is a cowboy and an artist and a guy that there's no one else like him. I've never met a personality like him. And Frank's done everything you ever thought of that a wild woolly cowboy has ever done, and yet he's a gentle, kind, good man with great morals and sense of fairness. One of the things I love to tell on him is that he stutters, of course. Frank was an alcoholic at one time and he went to AA and whipped that. He used to tell me that his mother told him when he was a young man and he wanted to be an artist, he said, "Y-y-y-you know, Beeler, my m-m-m-mother always told me that a-a-a-all the artists that sh-sh-sh-she ever knew either turned out to be q-q-q-queers or alcoholics and y-y-y-you know Beeler, I'm s-s-s-sure glad I turned out to be an alcoholic." (Laughter) There's a million stories on Frank that everybody tells but he was a great cow puncher and a good bronc rider with a great sense of humor, great wit and one of the reasons that cowboys are colorful people.

ZL: Was he always an artist, or was he. . .

JB: No, he was always a cowboy. I remember a girl asked him one time, she was interviewing him for the newspaper and she said, "I understand Mr. Polk you used to be a cowboy," and he stopped her right there and he said, "Wait a minute, I didn't u-u-u-used to be a cowboy, I a-a-a-am a cowboy, I just don't happen to be workin for no one right now." (Laughter) And that's the way he was, so he always was a cowboy. But the way he started out is he did these wood carvings; and like a lot of guys, he was probably laid up or something and started doing that just to pass the time. He became pretty well known for his wood carvings and then he got involved in doing the sculpture working in clay and went on to



distinguish himself as being one of the fine western sculptors. He's a great stickler for detail in his work and he gets all the right stuff in there. He was a great mule packer. He packed all the stuff when they built the Phantom Ranch down at the bottom of the Grand Canyon. Frank was the packer that packed most all that stuff down in there. When Nelson Eddy and [Jeannette McDonald] did that song, "Indian Love Call" up on top of the mountain, Frank was a stunt man and an extra in that movie. They were trying to figure out a way to get some music up there on that mountain, and Frank said, "Well, I can get an organ up there." They said, "You can't pack an organ up there." Frank packed a mule with that organ and that organ sat right in the middle of that mule. And then just to show off a little bit, he packed a pot of beans right in the middle of the organ and never spilled a bean on the way up there. He said he never got so tired of hearing a song in all of his life as he did that "Indian Love Call." (They both laugh)

ZL: Did you and he collaborate on a book?

JB: Oh yeah, I illustrated a book called *F-F-F Frank Polk, His Life Story* and I illustrated it for him. He's a great guy. He lives in the old bank building at Mayer still. He's not in the greatest health, but he's doing okay.

ZL: What do you like about living in Sedona?

JB: I like getting up every morning, I love the climate and I love the beauty here and we've kind of got our own environment. I've got our animals and our horses and my studio and a nice home and our family. Our son Jody is married to Monica and we've got a little grandson, John. They live here in town and Jody works for W.L. Gore in Flagstaff, driving back and forth every day. But we get to see John and them every day. Our daughter Tracy lives in Santa Barbara now. She's married and is working on her own art career. She and I are going to have a show together in March at Trailside. So they're not too far away. But we just love it. There's a lot of changes and like the old boy from Dallas said, "I walked up to a guy and he said, 'I bet you've seen a lot of changes here, haven't you?'" He said, "Yeah, and I haven't been for a damn one of 'em." (Chuckle) And that's the way you get to feel here in Sedona sometimes. But it is home and we always enjoy it when we come back here.

ZL: You're known to be a collector. What are some of the various things that you enjoy collecting?

JB: We've collected art ever since the beginning when we could. The house is full of art and it's not all mine. Most of it isn't. We enjoy art, we enjoy artifacts. We grew up around these Indian things and bead work and everything and we've collected that always. But I also like knives and guns and saddles. I have a collection of saddles, a collection of guns, and a collection of handmade knives. I guess I'm just a collector, I'm a pack rat. It's hard to find a place to put the stuff now.



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ZL: Sometimes you give lectures and teach classes. Are they always related to art?

JB: Usually, yeah. Yeah I'd be foolish to lecture much about anything else. (Chuckle) I've been asked to talk about art, talk about CA, talk about where the future and what's happening with western art because I've been involved in it since the very beginning. Been kind of in the middle of this art movement and I enjoy teaching at the workshops. We did a workshop at the Three Twenty Ranch last year in Montana. We had a hundred students and there were ten of us that taught, so I enjoy that.

ZL: You've been to ASU a couple of times?

JB: Well I was asked to go, no, I haven't been there. Last summer I was at a couple of universities back in Indiana. Went back there and gave a couple of talks. I don't consider myself a lecturer, but I have been involved in this Western art thing a long time and can shed a little light on that. I was very proud that Kansas State presented me with a Meritorious Achievement Award a few years ago, which is an award given on the grounds of your achievement in your field which was nice.

ZL: Congratulations. Are you a member of the Sedona Sheriff's Posse?

JB: In the early days here, the only way you could rope around here was to belong to a posse. So I joined the posse and Charlie Dye was in the posse and a bunch of us, Ed Wright and all of our buddies here that we run around with. We were called out a couple of times, but most of the time it was just guys having fun roping. So I was in the sheriff's posse for ten or twelve years.

ZL: But it was more for roping activities.

JB: More for roping, yeah.

ZL: You mentioned that you liked to participate on working ranches as a hand sometimes and you used to work on the Windmill Ranch.

JB: Yeah, with Duane Miller. When we first moved here, Duane Miller and his family ran the Windmill Ranch, the DK Cattle Company. I would go out there in the spring and fall and help with the roundup and branding and everything and I still like to do that. I go out, in fact just this year, I've been to two big ones this year and then I like to rope still and go to the ropings. So I still like to be active in that.

ZL: You're a team roper.

JB: Yes.



ZL: And you're a heeler?

JB: Mostly.

ZL: Would you describe that?

JB: Team roping is an event where a steer is let out and there's a barrier and two riders ride out and one heads the steer and turns it off and the other man, the heeler, comes up behind it and throws a loop. The idea's to catch two feet and the steer is stretched just briefly and there's a flagger that gives a flag and the event's timed. But it's an event that came originally from working cattle. You still do that doctorin' a grown animal or when you're brandin', ropin' 'em and sometimes when the calves are too big, you head and heel them. And the little calves, you try to heel them all the time because it's easier on 'em when you drag 'em to the fire.

ZL: There's a rodeo called the Cowpunchers Rodeo?

JB: Arizona Cowpunchers Reunion. It's an organization that, I don't know how many years it's been formed, but I've been in it for a number of years. It's an organization of working cowboys. They have a get together a couple times a year, but the main one is the reunion. For years, it was in Williams and the last couple of years, it's been in Flagstaff. They have an encampment usually, or some people stay at a motel. It's just a lot of camps and there are events like at ordinary RCA professional rodeos, but it's a rodeo. It's a family affair and it's a fun time to see people you haven't seen in a long time. There's probably five hundred members. Sharon and I went up this year. We were up there three days at Flag at the Fairgrounds area.

ZL: And another thing you've been involved in recently is a show called Trappings of the American West.

JB: The Trappings was a show that I kind of instigated. It's a show of the very best of the saddle makers, bit and spur makers, engravers, hitchers and braiders that make the things that cowboys use and like. The way that kind of evolved was that strangely enough, our daughter was living in Florence, Italy. We went to visit her and were with some people walking around. Florence is a place known for its beautiful high fashion leather things and trinkets and jewelry and clothes and stuff. These people we were with said, "It's too bad that nobody in America can do that kind of work anymore." And I stopped and I said, "Oh the artisan people are doin' that but they've been making it for cowboys, they still are making it for cowboys, but there's the guys that can do this work and better." And so when we got home, I thought about that, that a lot of people weren't aware of that. There's a knife maker up there,



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Dan Day, who came to me and said, “Do you think a show with cowboy art and knives would be a good idea?” The Coconino Center For the Arts wanted to do this. I said, “Well, not necessarily,” but I said, “I’ve got an idea that I think would be a good one.” And so I presented him with the idea of having all these handmade cowboy things together and have it lit and presented just like art with paintings, sculpture and a bit or a saddle; all with the same lighting, all presented as art. The show, I think it was seven years ago, was very successful. We tried to fit twelve of the best in each field to be there. That’s what we’ve done. It’s perpetuated on and it was one of the original shows of its kind. There’s some others sprung up around like it now, but it’s a very successful show and it’s one that all these guys put in their catalogs or resume.

ZL: And you draw people from all over the west?

JB: All over, yeah. People from all over come to that show. It’s a fun deal. We’ve even had some poets come there and some entertainment. Ian Tyson has been there and sung and had his band there. It’s kind of a fun cowboy weekend up there in Flagstaff. It’s usually in the spring.

ZL: Are the items for sale?

JB: The items are for sale.

ZL: And you give awards?

JB: No, there aren’t awards given.

ZL: As you’ve gained recognition and popularity, it must be hard to find the time to paint and sculpt.

JB: I get up every morning excited about what I’m going to do and I go out there and get involved with my art—paint or draw or sculpt or something. There’s times when you get busy doing something else. But almost everything we do, our friends are artists, a lot of the people are collectors. We’re revolved around Western art all the time, but we do some other things. We travel a lot. Of course we enjoy our horses and ride and I like to go huntin’ once in a while and we travel. But you do have to kind of sort through some social activities sometimes. This weekend, I was supposed to be at two places. At the American Cowboy Symposium in Lubbock, I was supposed to get an award there and I couldn’t go. There’s an opening of my work in Bartlesville, Oklahoma and from the Little Rock Museum that opened Saturday night and they wanted me to come back there. They were going to fly us back there. There’s times when Sharon says I don’t say no enough. But I had to say no to both of those when I wanted to go to both of them. So there are times when I never thought I’d be saying, “No, I can’t do that.” Of course I’ve got some deadlines right now for the CA show coming up.



ZL: Do you find that you need a certain amount of time alone to think through. . .?

JB: Oh yeah, the creative process is a solitary thing. You do it alone and strangely enough, a trip, sometimes driving along, I get a lot of things sorted out driving. I know people that don't like to drive but I love to drive along and look at some pretty country. I don't mean I like to drive in some city or some place I don't like, but I love to get in the car and drive up through the Rocky Mountains or through some good country and it's very inspiring. But I read a lot and the early morning hours a lot of times I get up real early, I'm up before anybody else and I sit and do a lot of my stewartin' at that time. Sharon and I found, especially since the kids are gone, that she'll come out sometimes when I'm working and we'll talk, or she'll bring something out or sometimes she likes to mix color and she's helped me with some sculpture and things. But most of the time I'm by myself.

ZL: Do you think the values of people have changed during your lifetime?

JB: I think that a lot in our modern society has changed. I saw a thing on television the other night. This kid come up politely to these two gals in this program and said, "Yes ma'am," and they looked at him and dressed him down and they said, "Listen, who you calling ma'am? You can call me 'Toots,' you can call me 'Babe,' you can call me 'Kitty,'" she named off all these things, but she said, "Don't call me ma'am." I told Sharon, I said, "Well gosh, my mother always taught me to say, yes, ma'am, and no, sir, and everything, and I never felt like I was being subordinate by saying it. That was a respectful thing." But the values have changed in our country, there's no question about it. This is one of the neat things I think about cowboys. Sharon and I were talking at the reunion about how fun it was to see grandpas with their grandkids and mothers with their kids, and fathers with their kids and mothers and fathers and sons and fathers and wives roping and doing things and trying to do things together, and all the fun they had, and how the family value thing is still pretty much intact with those group of people. Where in some of the rest of our society, seems like it's kind of coming loose at the seams.

ZL: What are some of your future goals?

JB: I really don't have any great big ones. I'm tickled to death doing what I'm doing. I'm just going to try to do it better that's all, and have some fun and enjoy all the things we've been fortunate enough to achieve.

ZL: One of the things that you were involved in at one point in time was Young Life.

JB: When our kids were young, Young Life was a very supportive thing here. It was a religious organization but also they got out and worked with the kids and kept kids lined out about drugs and



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taught them about them and it was one of the early things that was teaching an anti-drug program. They go off to camps and do things. We became active, trying to help with that organization, because we saw all the good that it did. Our daughter was involved in that, not that she had a drug problem. It wasn't a problem child thing; they were there for the kids and it was an option to some of the other stuff and Sharon and I helped with that.

ZL: If you could speak to young people today, teenagers, and talk to them about the future, what kind of advice would you give them?

JB: I think with all the talk about modern technology and with the all these trick deals that everybody worries about and everything, I still think everything's based on people trying hard, learning as much as you can about everything and don't cut any corners. Try to learn everything that you can and do something well, whatever it is, do it the best you can and people will find you. If you do something well and you do something better than somebody else, you can always get along and somebody will find that out and you can get through life in good fashion.

ZL: Can you think of any other areas that you would like to put on this tape?

JB: I didn't mention my family very much. Jody and Tracy have been a big part of our family and I'm very proud of our daughter who's got her own distinguished career.

ZL: You and she had a show once in Phoenix.

JB: She, Sharon and I had the show. That's when I did the "Fascination." But Tracy's in all the good galleries and doing really well, is married, lives in Santa Barbara. Our son Jody is creative. He does medical videos for the Gore Company, is in medical research and has distinguished himself with that and has won some international awards for his films. We've got a grandbaby and a daughter-in-law we're crazy about and we get to see John every day.

ZL: How old is he?

JB: He's nineteen months. I'm looking forward to teaching him how to ride and shoot and do all the boy stuff. But I'm just very honored and proud to be involved in this recognition that I've received from the Historical League or Society and thank you. We love Arizona. It's been wonderful to us and like I said, I maybe could have done this somewhere else, but I don't think so.

ZL: Well thank you very much for this interview.

JB: Well thank you.

