

File 1

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(I am in Bethany, Oklahoma, and I'm talking to Monte Dodson. It's July 12th, 2006. Why don't you go ahead and say your name and say something so I can get a sound reading?)

Well, I'm Monte Dodson. I was born in 1925 right here in Oklahoma City.

(That's perfect. I'm just gonna go through the questions, and we can talk about anything else comes to your mind.)

Well, I didn't know what you wanted to start, did you want me to give you background?

(Yeah, just about you. Did your family grow up here?)

Right here, not too far, about three or four miles, is where I grew up. I was born in 1925, it's during kind of the fur boom there, even though it was Depression days. It was Depression days. Furs didn't bring very much, but a nickel would buy you a loaf of bread about like that, or 10 cents would buy you a large loaf of bread. Gasoline, 11 to 13 cents a gallon.

(I wish! [laughs])

Almost I would say in every county, perhaps in the county seat there would be a fur buyer, probably. That's how much interest there was in fur.

(What kind of fur?)

All kinds.

(Any kind?)

Mm-hmm. Even skunks. A lot of interest in skunks.

(Did they dye them? They must have dyed them.)

Well, in those days the black skunks was the ones they wanted—was the least white. Nowadays, they want the broad stripe. See, there's four different kinds. They have the blacks, the shorts, the narrows, and the broads. And so then they wanted the black. They didn't mind the smell—

(Jeez.)

— in those days.

0:02:01.2

I was in Linwood grade school, and I can think of at least five other guys that were trappin', and they got me interested. My grandmother bought me this book, 50 cents.

(*Guide for Trapping*—.)

Here's what she wrote on there. This was my guidebook to start with. It's pretty well beat up. I studied the heck out of it, too.

(Oh, yeah!)

When I started trappin', it was mostly skunks and possums, and would you believe I'm still catchin' skunks and possums. [laughs]

([laughs] I can believe it. We get 'em around our house.)

Do you see, you can see my handwriting there, you can tell how young I was, I was 10 years old when I started trappin'.

(*Guide for Trapping and Care of Raw Furs*, by Harry J. Ladue.)

Right.

(That's cool. Former U.S. Game Warden.)

0:02:56.1

And then I wrote to the animal trap company and got this catalog, which I thought you might be interested to see.

(Victor.)

I wrote my name in. It has pictures of all the traps. And these traps now, they're very collectible. I don't know if you're interested in that or not.

(At the Vertebrate Pest Conference, there's a man who comes and has a huge display of old traps. It's really interesting.)

So he told you about them.

(I've seen some, but nothing like this. This is marvelous.)

See, these are very, very collectible traps. They still make the Newhouse trap, but it's got raised letters. These are stamped in the pan, see. I brought the traps here. [Sound of footsteps and chair moving.] I didn't know whether any of the guys showed you any traps.

0:03:50.1

(No, I haven't seen any.)

[sound of chains]

I bought these at the last fed auction.

(Wow!)

This is a Newhouse 1 1/2. It's very built still. You could still use it, see?

(Oh, yeah.)

But if you ever get into trap collecting, be sure that it's complete, hadn't been run over, and that you can read the pan. That's very important. There are some other traps here [sound of chains] that are also collectible, [sound of chains] but the pans are not readable. This is a Victor.

(Oh, yeah, it looks like it's nice and—it's flat and it's [can't understand])

Well, it's just old. But one thing you might—if your husband ever gets to collectin', the old traps have this square rivet on the—this is the cross, this is the base, and it'll be a square. The modern traps are spot-welded, particularly the smaller traps. That's one way to tell. To be a collectible trap, it needs to be complete—

(Workable?)

It doesn't have to be offset or anything. The jaw should be pretty good shape and hadn't been run over. The chain—now, this would be an excellent collector trap except the pan is not very readable. It still has a value, but not very much. This trap here, now, I can read the "Newhouse trap," and it's complete. [sound of chains]

(Chain on it and everything.)

0:05:14.7

There was a couple others. [sound of chains] [Can't hear words] there, and—

(Those are a lot smaller. Those are still Newhouse?)

These are Triumphs. See where the cross is pinched? [chuckles] Unfortunately, this trap has—you can read the pan, but it's been hurt. See, it's got—

(It's broke, yeah.)

And the chain is not right. But this trap is the best trap except you can't read the pan. But it's complete, and it still has a value. It's just a shame that—but you know, I got 'em all for \$9. And the Newhouse trap by itself is probably worth \$10 to \$15 just by itself. But I got into trap collecting.

(You could put a board up with all the different traps and snares.)

I could. I've got a whole shed full of traps. I've got to get rid of 'em. If you ever start collectin'—

(We can put them in—)

—I would say make it somethin' small.

([laughs])

Like shot glasses or earrings, because unless you've got the space, space is gonna become a problem. My first shed is just full of traps.

(Traps! [laughs])

Jerald or Glynn would probably say the same thing. You finally get to the point where you're just loaded down with traps. And I'm a tool collector, too. They don't show it in here, but they make a tool for a Newhouse trap that is very collectible.

(Do they still—)

It's probably worth over \$1,000.

(Oh, you're kidding!)

0:06:55.1

But the unfortunate thing is, there's not very many of 'em, and they weren't marked.

(So you can't really tell the provenance unless you know what you're doing?)

I know what they look like. They were made for bear traps.

(What would you use 'em for, just to work on—?)

I don't know exactly, but the Newhouse trap can be taken down a lot easier. Here's a—I've got a couple of those Newhouse gopher traps like that. These are fur frames that you can take the bolts off of here, see, and they come out. I don't know what-all they did with 'em, but they're built pretty good to start with. And any trap—tell your husband, if he ever gets to collectin', any steel trap he finds with teeth in it, very collectible. They quit puttin' 'em out for small animals years ago.

(Now they use passive-jaw traps.)

I thought you might be interested in that sort of thing.

(Oklahoma doesn't have a trapping ban? Or anything here?)

Oh, Oklahoma's got some of the worst trapping regulations you could ever imagine, just terrible, absolutely terrible. That's why—I didn't this past winter, but for the last 18 years I've trapped in Texas, because they're very generous with their laws. I wouldn't say "generous," they're just reasonable. Oklahoma is just horrible. That's just the way it is. You've got to put up signs, [sighs] you've got to have permission, written permission, you've got to have 24-hour check, it's only a two-month season. Everything is just—but anyway—

(That is cool.)

—this was when I was a young boy.

0:08:34.7

(Did your dad trap?)

No.

(Was he a rancher?)

No, but he was a hunter and fisherman, and I did a lot of that through the years. Like I say, during the Depression days, I had a bicycle, that was my only means of transportation. I started off walking to the trap line, as far as I could go from the house, but later on I went to the bicycle. [chuckles] I rode a bicycle clear till I [chuckles] practically the first year of college. In high school, I never had a date with a girl, because all I had was a bicycle. I didn't think any girl would want to go on a bicycle.

([chuckles])

Besides that I didn't have any money. [laughs]

(Now you could fit in, everybody rides their bikes now.)

So all I did was hunt, fish, and trap. And my mother, she'd get pretty aggravated with me. "Don't you ever want to amount to anything?"

([chuckles])

You'll never amount to anything bein' out there on a creek bike." And she was probably right.

([chuckles])

But I fur trapped clear on up through college, down here at OU in Norman. I had an automobile by then, had a '40 Model Ford. I ran it on highway 9 out east towards Blanchard and then back up toward the Oklahoma border and then came back again. I ran what we call bridge-hopping, I put a couple of traps under each bridge as you come through. I did that while I was goin' to school. I had a fur buyer in Norman.

0:10:05.2

(How much was an average fur? How much did it cost, did they pay you?)

Oh, like I said, back then in the '30s, a dime, 15 cents for a possum, but you could get a good hamburger for 15 cents then. [chuckles] Skunks maybe 75 cents, a good black one would get you a dollar. Mink were highly prized.

(That's what I was thinking.)

I never did catch too many mink. I can remember I caught my first one, and it was caught accidentally. I didn't get into long-haired fur trapping till I went to work for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, then I got into that.

(What did you major in in college?)

Well, like I said, the only thing I did was hunt, fish, and trap after school and on weekends. Well [pause] when I graduated from high school, I said, "Boy, oh, boy, I've got it made now! I've got plenty of time to hunt, fish, and trap!" But my mother had other ideas. [laughs]

([laughs])

She loaded me up in a car and took me down to Oklahoma University.

(Good for her! [laughs])

[laughs] And enrolled me. Well, I had work during the summer for the state highway department part-time—I mean, not part-time, but just during the summer—on a survey party, what we called plates and surveys, where they survey for profiles on roads and things. So she put me in the college of civil engineering. [sighs] Which is good, except the courses were just awful.

(They're math, a lot of math. [chuckles])

Differential calculus, integral calculus, differential equations, you know? Oh, geez. And I was flunkin' everything, flunkin' everything. So they called me in. I had a counselor, just an old professor, called me in, trying to figure out how to keep me from failin' and everything. Finally he got—he said, "How come you—?" "Well, I just don't care that much about it." He said, "What do you like to do?" I said, "Well, I like to trap." And then this old guy just snarled at me. He said, "What do you want to be, an educated trapper?"

([chuckles])

You know, if I'd have had the nerve to do it, I'd have said, "Better than bein' an educated SOB." 'Course I would have got kicked out of school for sayin' it, glad I didn't!

0:12:29.5

But I should have. And he shouldn't have said that. And that's what I turned out to be, an educated trapper, really. [chuckles]

([chuckles])

I trap, fur trap. When I got out of there, I went to work on a lake patrol, out here at Lake Hefner (?) for the city, just patrolling and enforcing regulations and things, for a very short time. And then I got wind of a position with the Oklahoma Game and Fish department, and I worked for them.

(What year was that? Do you remember?)

1957, I believe. I worked for them, and I took a position as waterfowl biologist. [looking through papers] I wrote some articles for them, and I did banding for 'em, too. You can see—there's one of my things. I was still trappin' and at one point I was banding waterfowl for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in cooperation with them. I started at Salt Plains refuge. Well [pause] raccoons are a good animal, but you can't believe what a predator they can be. See, I like to run the traps in the mornin' and in the evenin', and the morning catch is really good. But boy, I'll tell you, if you don't get there quick, the raccoons would get in there, they would kill and eat one or two, and if there was 50 ducks in the trap, they would kill every one of them.

(You're kidding!)

Just for the fun of killin'.

(I knew coyotes did that, but I didn't know a raccoon would do it.)

Oh, back then it was terrible. So I set a trap and caught it, this was on the national wildlife refuge, caught the 'coon and killed it. Well, the refuge manager told me that I'd better do my trappin' somewhere else, that's how protective they are about everything. They didn't care about the 'coon killin' all the ducks, you know? [chuckles]

0:14:22.2

So I went down to the Naval ammunition depot down at McAlester and I trapped down there. I had occasion to meet a government trapper assigned there, Fay Hardin, really a nice guy. He's gone now, but he was really good to me. Anyway, and I trapped ducks down there. But then I finally went on down to Lake Murray, on the east side of the lake over there. I trapped, I think I banded around 19,000 ducks down there.

(Oh, God.)

So I was trappin', I wasn't fur trappin', but I was trappin'. I still had trouble with 'coons, and finally I had to have an electric fence run clear out into the water around the trap to keep the 'coons from gettin' in there and killin'. I hated the 'coons from that standpoint. I don't hate 'em now, but I hated 'em then.

Anyway, I worked for the game department about 1957, workin' with waterfowl. [sound of shuffling papers] There was a U.S. game agent name of Aubrey Goodman, and we became real good friends. And he told me about this job that was coming available in the branch of Predator and Rodent Control. And he was a good reference. Actually, his office was in the same building down in Oklahoma City. So it really—it got me in. So that's when I started to work for the outfit, in 1957.

Have you met Bill Nelson?

(I don't think so.)

Not to be confused with the legendary Bill Nelson up in Montana and Wyoming.

(That's the one I was thinking of.)

0:15:56.1

Not him, no. This is W.O. Nelson, Jr. I think he's still around. He was the district agent there. Originally, I'll show you later, the original first district agent was John Gatlin, who was a former regional supervisor in Albuquerque, and then a gentleman by the name of A.E. Gray followed him, and then W.O. Nelson followed.

So anyway, I started as a GS5. They put me down in the basement of a sort of a warehouse. We had a great big barrel full of Newhouse 14s, with teeth, you know. Well, they had to get up to date, so I was given the job of tearin' down all those 14s and puttin' in offset round jaws. And I—within, I don't know, a couple a weeks, I just ruined—

([chuckles])

—about \$3,000 worth of good collectible traps. [laughs] But it belonged to the government.

([chuckles])

It was theirs to ruin. But I just cringe when I think about it. I've got one at home, it was one—it was stolen somewhere. I bought it off an old boy for \$20. But it's complete. It's got everything. That's the only one I've got, and it'd been stolen. Glynn Riley probably told you how many traps they lost down here.

(Yeah, he loses them a lot.)

People steal traps. If a guy—I lost 16 this last winter.

(Jeez.)

If the guy would come to me and say, "Do you really need the trap?" I'd give him the trap. And these guys that steal 'em, I don't know what they do with 'em.

(Are they stealin' 'em because you don't want you trapping, or because they trap themselves, or because it's there and they take it?)

There's always a chance it is a trapper that wants 'em. Maybe it's a guy that wants to sell 'em for a few bucks to go buy a few joints of pot or somethin' like that, or maybe think they can hang 'em on the wall or somethin', I don't know. There's just somethin' so fascinating about a steel trap.

0:17:54.2

I remember one time I was out here off of 39th Street, it was in the afternoon, I was down at a little place checking some traps. There was three little kids—teenagers. I heard one of 'em say, "Hey, you guys, I found me a trap!" Boy, I went runnin' up there and took it away from them in a hurry, or I would have lost that. But there's just somethin' fascinating about the traps.

(I can see kids doin' it.)

So anyway, that's how I got started. I worked there.

(So you were in Oklahoma City for awhile?)

Yeah, the office was downtown, you know. Now it's out near the Capitol, but it was in a building, just an office building, downtown. And I got acquainted and I really, really enjoyed it and met a lot of good guys. Most of 'em are all gone now. That's a sad thing about livin' a long time, is, you lose all of your friends. That's the thing about it.

(That's what my dad's saying, a lot of his friends are goin'.)

So if you want to—having started, if you want to go on with your questions.

(Let's see. What kind of, you told me about your work history as a trapper. What kind of work did you do when you were out of Oklahoma City? Did you get sent out to the district?)

Well, I actually was put on as—it would be an assistant district agent, just a GS5. But he let me go out and do some trappin'. A fellow, one of the assistants named John J. Pickens, a great trapper, I'll show you some pictures after a while, started showin' me how to trap. I trapped for a while. He wanted me to trap so I know what it's all about and what to look for, you know. We did den hunting and we'd hunt for puppy playgrounds, you know. At that time—I have to tell you this, you know I'm hardened enough about killin' now, but the first den of coyote pups that I dug up, the little fellas, you know, I had eight of 'em, I looked at 'em and I said, "God forgive me," and I killed 'em. It was really hard to kill those little ol' puppies, you know? But that was what had to be done, because durin' April and May, if you've got killin' goin' on, generally they're feedin' some pups.

(They're feeding the puppies?)

Yeah, 'cause they can live off of grasshoppers and a lot of stuff, they don't really have to kill. Not that they wouldn't if they had the chance, but most of the time, during the spring and summer, if you're gettin' killin', you start lookin' for the den. And this John Pickens was a super den-hunter. It was just like a detective, in a way. Drive the roads lookin' for a sign. One thing you might mention if you want to, I always tell the guys, what's the difference between sign and good sign? Sign is where a coyote is crossed out the road. Good sign is where they has come and gone, both ways. That way it tells you it's a regular travel way.

(OK, so they're always going through there on their way out looking for—?)

0:20:57.9

If you want to set on that sign right there, or if you want to follow it durin' the summer months, one way or the other, you're gonna find a den, probably, or a puppy playground. But John Pickens showed me all that. We always said that old John was half coyote.

(Coyote! He'd have to be to find them.)

Such a great man, just so super. He's gone now, but I won't ever forget him.

But they put me to doin' that, and then they put me—I had the southwest district of Oklahoma. I went down there, there was this old boy, Lyle Rexrow [?], and the first trip I made there to him, I walked into his barn and there was always skunk hides on boards.

(It smelled?)

I said, "Wow! You can't do that. You can't save skunks!" He was taking me. He said, "Well, they're already dead, I killed 'em on cyanide guns and what have you." I said, "It's taboo! You can't do it! Get rid of those things. I don't want to see any more hides."

(Oh, jeez. [chuckles])

"Don't save anything unless we tell you to save 'em."

(That was the policy then? You had to dispose of them?)

Oh, you can't save furs, skin and sell it at all! That's strictly taboo.

(Oh, as a government trapper?)

I guess you can't even sell the glands. You can't sell anything.

(You can't make a profit from anything?)

You can't do anything. Oh, man, that is—I just said, "I don't ever want to see—" He was an awful nice old boy. He got rid of 'em. I don't know how he ever did, whatever, he probably dropped 'em off somewhere. [laughs]

([laughs] Buried 'em.)

That was it. But I worked all down in there, and then we got into the compound 1080. I don't know whether you've been informed on that.

(The Research Center, I used to work with Guy Connelly. Mike Fall is another person that worked on the coyotes.)

0:22:51.2

Here, in the Oklahoma district, it was Oklahoma and Kansas together, we had both states. So I wrote an article for one of the trapper papers.

(I'm gonna have to do a literature search on you.)

You're goin' home with these copies, I made 'em for you.

(Oh, good, thank you.)

[looking through papers] "Prairie Dog Control." Here's one working with the ranchers and showin' them how we use 1080 grain, one little dipper around a prairie dog hole. This was

mostly in the Oklahoma Panhandle and northwestern Oklahoma and all over in western Kansas, clear up there almost to the Colorado line. We walked, we walked.

(I've seen photographs of people puttin' the bait out, and they're walking a line, a bunch of 'em walking around the whole town.)

Boy, there's thousands of acres of prairie dogs. I'd hate to see 'em exterminated, really and truly.

(I think they're part of the ecosystem—)

Right, yeah.

(— and they need to be—as long as they don't cause problems.)

When I was by myself, a long time I just worked by myself, small maybe just be 40, 50 acres, I'd drive in. I had the 222 Remington with a scope and I would always just shoot off all the easy ones, the dumb ones. By actual count on this 222, I killed over 2,000 prairie dogs.

(Oh, God, jeez.)

I sold that rifle here recently at an auction. I got \$300 for it. But it was a darn good gun, had a lot of history behind it. I did prairie dog work. We did bird control work, too.

(Were those the main problems, that were coyote and prairie dog? Was the bird—?)

The birds kind of came on later, bird control came on later. I can tell you about that a little bit later. Anyway, this will go home with you.

(Somebody—)

And then I had this thing here. I quit the Game department. I worked good for the Game department, and it helped me get my job.

(They're still having the same problem with predator control in the refuges. They don't want to do it.)

[sighs] Yeah, I know.

(I believe that's true.)

Well, they almost—they got the national parks mentality, I think. Protect everything, no matter what it is. I don't want to exterminate anything, but as long as it's got a chance of comin' back, you know—

0:25:33.5

(They're having a problem now with endangered species animals that are on the brink of disappearing, they're just getting wiped out by predators. So we've done some work with that. I

know that they've started asking for help. You used to go out in the southwestern part of the state. Did you have to work out of your house from there? Were you in an office?)

I had this office here.

(Oh, here?)

I lived in the city and worked out here, just drove a government car and went down. I had about six or seven trappers to work with or more. I'd just visit 'em or ride a trap line with 'em, just see that everything was goin' OK, if they had any problems. It was just a matter of supervision.

(How did you, did the ranchers call you or the people that had the problems, they just called the office and said, "Get out here"?)

It worked both ways. We had cooperative agreements with the counties. Of course we got money from the state, and we had the federal funds, but we wouldn't put a man in a county at that time unless the county commissioners would put up money. We'd have a cooperative agreement. So if a county didn't have an agreement, we might go down there and just work for a day or two doin' somethin', you know, but we're not gonna give 'em a day-to-day control without a cooperative agreement. Now I don't think it's that way, but then it was. And our field force, I don't know how many men they've got here in Oklahoma now, did John tell you how many?

0:27:06.7

(I don't know. I can find out.)

I think our whole field force was probably no more than 30 guys then. Now they've probably got about 100, I imagine, or more.

(I don't know how big Oklahoma is compared to—I know Texas is huge, but I don't know about Oklahoma, I don't know how many people.)

They have built up their personnel over the years. So we did that. But sometimes I would stay with the government hunters, I'd stay with 'em, stay overnight. They'd let me stay with 'em. I'd leave some money. I was always told to leave money.

([chuckles])

'Cause I was gettin' reimbursements.

(Per diem, yeah.)

So I always leave 'em—boy, I'd eat good, too.

([laughs])

Farm people, you know. It was really—I really enjoyed it.

(What were some farms that you visited that you remember specifically?)

What?

(Any of the ranches, problems that you encountered, do you remember anything that was a real problem that took a while to solve?)

To solve? Well, it was an awful lot of 'em. [laughs] Awful lot of 'em. We had a sheep man down in southwestern Oklahoma, I think he was around Cooperton. He was one of those guys that he told the people, he got back there and he said, "You don't ever want to get off their backs." He would call almost every week or so. "I got a problem, I got a problem, you gotta come down here, you gotta come down here!" I got a guy over there right now where I trapped on this past winter in eastern Oklahoma, if a neighbor even hears a coyote—

([laughs])

— he calls me. "Oh, you gotta come do somethin' about that!" You know. [laughs] But they get that mentality. I guess they've had trouble in the past. But you don't have those guys—most of 'em are pretty—they're not experiencin' any losses.

0:29:04.9

Now, these fur trappers, they'll claim predator control. I had one 'em call me, and I probably—he apologized later for sayin' it, but he was braggin'. He went down in southwest Texas one winter and caught maybe 300 or 400 coyotes. And he was braggin' about it, how the rancher was so happy. I said, "That's good, that's good. But I want to tell you one thing. The only way to measure your success in predator control, you don't measure it by the number of coyotes taken. You measure it by the numbers of sheep, lambs, and calves that reach the market. That's the way to tell what your success is." Because one coyote in the right place is worth 100 taken where they're really not botherin' a whole lot.

(How do you know you've got the right coyote? How did you figure it out?)

Well, if the killin' stops, you know you did! [laughs]

([laughs] Okay.)

If the killin' stops, you know that's—durin' the summer months, if you get the—generally if you get the den, get the pups, you've got the immediate situation. Now, you may have it pop up somewhere else. The guys are always busy, keeping out things. I went to Arizona, transferred out there.

(When was that?)

[pause] Probably around 1960. This is what they gave me when I left.

(Oh, your brag book.)

So I got out there, and it was a completely different ball game, just a handful of men and a lot of country. Trapping was just not their thing, except for one man who was a bear trapper.

(So they had bear and coyote? What other kinds of problems did they have?)

Mostly it was coyotes and bobcats, bears, and lions.

(And lions.)

I went out there and all those guys were just completely, totally poison-oriented. I had a difficult time dealin' with 'em, and maybe some of 'em didn't think too much of me. I wanted 'em to trap, but they said, "We don't want to set any traps, we have to go back and run 'em." What they liked to do is put out poison all winter and then strychnine and the other types, and then they'd use the cyanide gun, the .38 special then. And they would use them. That's all they used. So they didn't have to run that stuff over there, set 'em a couple days ago, run 'em once a week, once every two weeks, reset 'em. They had done a good job of pullin' the coyotes down, all right.

0:31:45.0

(Wouldn't they kill everything else around there, too?)

Not on 1080, really. Now strychnine is not as selective. But they relied mostly on 1080 and the cyanide gun. You will kill very few things with a cyanide gun. Raccoons will pull 'em with their feet, and you'll kill a fox or something now and then. But it's not that bad.

(Is a cyanide gun like the early M44?)

Same design. I'll show you pictures of them. I'll show you pictures here where we have—a guy developed a thing to cut a hole in the ground and drive on down there and just leave the top level with the ground, because we worry about calves. I never killed a calf on a cyanide gun, but I was always worried about 'em, 'cause those calves are curious and they'll pull a lot of things. I don't remember investigating where we had a calf killed by a gun, but we were always worried about it, particularly if you put anything in the bait that was sweet that might cause 'em to pull 'em.

I had a lot of trouble in Arizona, the guys, they wouldn't trap. I just had to practically make 'em set traps, and they just didn't like it. When I left, they were glad to see me go—[laughs]

([chuckles])

— 'cause they just—but I could see—they had a lot of company, but you're not goin' to kill bobcats on poison. You gotta trap 'em, and they wouldn't trap for bobcats. I was tryin' to get 'em to trap for cats, and they wouldn't do it.

This one fella, and you're gonna take this back, I wrote this up, Russell Culbreath, he was really a super, super tracker.

(Tell me about him.)

This is goin' back. I wrote two articles in *The American Trapper*. I put both of 'em together for you here. He caught lions, he caught 300 bears.

(Is he the bear trapper?)

He caught the only jaguar I think that's ever been trapped in Arizona.

(So he was the one that was the bear trapper down there who worked for you?)

Yeah. See, he was also originally from Oklahoma, so we had a lot in common to start with. He didn't have any education hardly at all. He was really a genius as far as trappin'.

(It says he lived in the same cabin formerly used by General Crook. I like Western history, so that's interesting.)

He worked on the Fort Apache Indian reservation.

(OK, he worked on the reservation for the Indians.)

But anyway, you'll get that—

(I'll enjoy that.)

When he was a young kid he was trappin', you know. He caught lions. I don't know how many lions he caught. He caught 300 bear, 1,000 lion or somethin'. It was a bunch of 'em. He really caught 'em.

(Did he use hounds?)

No. Steel trap. He was a steel trap man. Yeah, he was good at it, too. He was highly respected on Fort Apache, I know that. And he was a good guy, too, alongside of it. And we were really good friends. I wrote this article after he passed away, and then his children, they wrote for copies of the magazine and we sent 'em a whole bunch. They were really tickled, because it meant a lot to 'em. This other one here was an early thing. It came out in the same magazine, but it was written in earlier years. [chuckles] One of the guys in Arizona set the cyanide gun.

(We've got a lot of old photographs at the Center that I'm trying to scan and put in.)

I've got a bunch here, if you want to look at 'em after while, photographs I've saved. I've got these annual reports. If you want these, you're welcome to take 'em, 'cause I don't want 'em any more.

0:35:48.0

(You don't want them? OK, I'll take 'em.)

These are all gonna go back with you.

(I'll put 'em in the archives. I can take 'em in my suitcase. [noise])

Yeah, I've got photographs in here, too, I was gonna show you.

(When you were working, did you ever do any work for the Research Center that you knew about, were aware of?)

Well, on bird control. You heard the name Fitzwater?

(Oh, yeah, Bill Fitzwater, yeah. We have his reprint collection at the Center. When he passed away, his wife gave it to us.)

Best Yankee I ever met.

(Yankee? [laughs])

[laughs] Really good, really a dandy one. There's a lot of pictures. Bill and I—this John Meyers was my assistant here in Oklahoma. He just passed away about two months ago. John C. Meyers. He was just about my age. Well, anyway, we'll get into the bird control thing here. I was gonna tell you somethin' kind of—you had one of your questions there about, have you ever had anything that was amazing? We had—here at Oklahoma City I had a request from the city of Tulsa. Pigeons in downtown Tulsa. They were messin' on cars and things and they were just a general nuisance. So Bill came over, and we had this, what they called DRC1339.

(Yeah, we still use it.)

[chuckles] And we mixed up this corn. The regional office and the powers in Washington would have had heart failure. Bill drove the pickup. I was sittin' in the back end of the pickup drivin' right down Main Street and throwin' out the corn! [laughs]

(Oh, my God! Jeez!)

These pigeons were small, and people were sayin', "Ooh, isn't that wonderful? They're feeding the pigeons!" [laughs]

([laughs])

"Isn't that nice? Oh, that's so nice!"

(That's terrible, when they start—)

The guys in Washington would have had a fit.

([laughs])

Well, it's slow-acting. They all went—down at the rail yard, they had this huge thing where they pulled all the trains under, and all these pigeons roosted on top of there, 250 pigeons died on top of this thing. [laughs] They had to get the hook and ladder truck out from the fire department to go up there [claps hands] and get 'em off there. [laughs]

([laughs])

We laughed about it, because we were ridin' down the people were like, "How nice, they're feedin' the pigeons."

(You guys are terrible! [chuckles])

We came out all right on that. While we were up there, there was a little small cow lot, I've got a picture or two here of it, and we went out there to just check on the bird situation. Just loaded with brown headed cowbirds. So Bill had some TEPP, are you familiar with that?

(Unh-unh.)

Tetraethyl Pyrophosphate. Very lethal, very lethal. And we had some cracked maize and we sifted out the flour, and Bill knew how to mix the right amount of the TEPP. You put in acetone and you stir it in. We just scattered—it was a small feedlot, we went and we just treated the whole thing. And then we went off and got a cup of coffee. Came back in about an hour or two [pause] there were dead birds everywhere. We picked up and counted 4,000, 4,000 cowbirds.

(Cowbirds, I didn't know there were that many.)

Four thousand cowbirds, you know?

(God!)

0:39:24.7

We don't have too much love for cowbirds, because you know what they do?

(Yeah, they ruin—they steal other birds' nests, don't they?)

They put their eggs in other—so I didn't mind killin' those things. [chuckles]

(Gosh.)

Anyway, we picked up 4,000 of 'em. So I worked with Fitzwater. He was a great guy.

([chuckles] He sounded like a character. I talked to him a couple of times. He was real nice, a real nice man. What did you like best about what you did, about your job?)

[pause] Oh, boy. That's hard to say. I just liked bein' out in the field mostly. I didn't care that much for the paperwork in the office. I didn't care about that. I knew I had to do it, but I'd much rather be out—I was happier when I was out in the field workin', whether it was bird control or prairie dog or coyotes. That was the—and of course I was learning all the time, but see, I've always been interested in trapping. I'm still trapping, still trapping

(On retainer, or do you—you don't go out for the fur, do you? Right now?)

I trapped this past winter for bobcats and raccoons and coyotes and gray fox. And I didn't get to do very much of it, because they stole all my traps.

(That's what I heard.)

But in the 18 winters prior to that, I trapped in Collingsworth County, Texas, made lots of friends out there, trapped on the Mill Iron Ranch, I don't know whether you heard of it. Used to be called the old Rockin' Chair.

(I've heard that name from the trail drives.)

There was three main ranches I think in the whole Texas Panhandle. The Rockin' Chair was one, and then the XIT was one. I'm not sure if I can remember the other one.

(From the old trail drives, Charlie Goodnight—)

Could be.

(— when they brought the cattle up from Texas, I think they came from one of those ranches.)

Could be. I can't remember the third ranch, but mostly those three ranches encompassed almost all of the Texas Panhandle in the early days. But at the time I went out there, the Mill Iron was down to 32,000 acres. They let me trap on it. I had a ball. You didn't have to worry about—in 18 winters out there, I lost one trap to thieves. One trap.

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(That's because there's nobody out there! [chuckles])

And the ranchers, they watch out there. But the reason I came back to Oklahoma to trap is because now this deer hunting has become such a thing, and people comin' clear from the Carolinas and up north will come out there and shoot a white-tailed deer.

(Is that just on private ranches?)

Yeah, leasing. It's big business. And this main rancher that Don Hawthorne put me in contact with, Don got me in out there, he told me, he says, "I make more money of my honey than I do off my cattle." So it got to where they said, "But we appreciate what you're doin', but can you hold off till after the deer season?" You're halfway almost out of the season, and then here comes the quail huntin'. So the last season I trapped there, altogether I was never on more than six sections, and that was not at one time. They just had me squeezed down. The guys were real nice, I got more friends, they all love me out there, but they just can't turn down that good money. The hunters just can't have you interrupt them. So first it was me who night spooked the deer away from the hunters, and then there's the bird dogs that might get in the trap.

(James [?] was talking about the problem with people that ran hounds and they didn't like his traps and they would destroy his traps.)

Oh, yeah.

(Did you ever run into that?)

Oh, very much so. Oh, even when I was working for the Game department down in Lake Murray, it's a state park, but they have what they call a peninsula that goes out there, and they had one gate that you go through. Well, I made friends with the supervisor and he let me lock that gate, but that locked out the hound men, they liked to go in there and run their hounds for sport. But what they do wasn't for sport. If their dogs catch anything, it's dead. They always say, "Oh, no, we pull our dogs off the coyotes. We don't let 'em kill 'em." Yeah, sure. You know how that goes.

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But anyway, I had trouble with the hound men there, and the old game warden there, he was in with the hound men. He just kept sayin', "Why don't you stop trappin'? Get rid of that duck trap and get out of here." I wouldn't do it. Boy, he was ready to almost come to blows with my supervisor there. This old game warden says, "If you don't make him pull that duck trap out of there, we're gonna go to Fifth [?] City." My supervisor said, "I'm not gonna let anything stop you but fear itself." So I stayed out there. But the guy, he sure didn't like it. That's where I—and then I've had trouble in many, many places with hound men.

There's a story that Don will probably tell you about, too, that got me busted out of my job with the hound men. But anyway, you asked one question about the scariest moment.

I got in where—these were coyotes that I called and shot. I got really hung up on calling and shooting varmints. I'd even go clear down into old Mexico and get licensed up and boy, those coyotes had never been called. They were really easy to call up. In Arizona, I was down on the border, on the Papago Indian Reservation. I got up on a hill, it was kind of a little embankment there, and a shelf was behind me. I had my head kind of where I'd be concealed, and I was callin', I had a good place to call. I was callin' and callin', and I looked around, and there was a gray fox right there behind me. Right there.

(Jeez.0

Well, I didn't want to shoot him, you know, 'cause I was waitin' to kill a coyote. So I just said, "Well, he's just excited, he'll run off." All of a sudden that sucker reached out and grabbed me right there, grabbed me right there.

(Oh, my God!)

I reached around and got him and pulled him around and I killed him with my hands.

(Jeez!)

I said, "Well, he's just excited." [pause] Maybe, maybe, maybe, just to be safe, maybe I'd better cut his head off. So I cut his head off.

(You were worried about rabies?)

Put it in the ice box. That was on a Sunday. So Monday mornin', the first thing I did, I went down to the Maricopa County health department and gave that fox to them. In about two hours they called and they said, "You get your butt down here on the double!"