

## INTERVIEW WITH BOB AUDETTE

By David K. Dunaway

Born in Raton Pass in 1926, coming from Chicago – the Eleventh Cavalry at UNM – geography of the UNM area in the '30s – hunting in the Sandias – ironworking and steelworking with the family in Chicago – the Dust Bowl years – University Heights elementary school – building the veteran's hospital in '32 – the "Okie parade" – Route 66 a "part of the countryside" – Dust Bowlers camps – dynamiting in the canyon to get the road through – hitch-hiking Route 66 in uniform – enlisted out of Albuquerque High – military convoys on Route 66 – sunk in Okinawa – used survivor's leave papers to fly back to Albuquerque, hitch-hiking between airfields – lost a tie-rod coming down Gold Road Hill outside of Oatman, AZ – arranging the welcoming station in New Mexico for the '92 tour and borrowing the State Police restored 1940 Chevy – issuing New Mexico passports – Route 66 noise versus post-interstate silence – the east side towns and industry after World War II – bringing the Dawson town jail to Barton – Doc Cox and restoring the 66 name – Route 66 associations in America and Holland – Japanese film crew – history of the New Mexico Route 66 Association – Route 66 as a "ribbon of history" – signs get stolen – 2400 miles, it's already a theme park – stenciling Route 66 in California and New Mexico, using the exact shield – the Route 66 Chamber of Commerce – picture collection

David Duanway      Bob – I'm glad to be here. Are we in the town of Barton?

Bob Audette        Yeah, if you want to call it that. That's what it used to be.

DD                    Maybe we could start by talking a little bit about your own life, and why don't you tell me where and when you were born.

BA                    Practically born right there, Raton Pass, on the way here. 1926.

DD                    Okay. How did you happen to be in the Raton Pass in 1926.

BA                    We were – my sister was sick, and we were coming here from Chicago. My mother, two sisters, and the train, going over the Raton Pass.

DD                    Where did you land when you arrived?

BA                    Albuquerque, in the University area there, and the east side. There was not hardly anything there, and I was raised there, and then out in the mountains too. I even – well, it was all open, there, on Central. Wasn't even paved yet or anything – that was all open area there, from Yale on up to Girard. Big open field on University side of 66, there; that's where the Eleventh Cavalry - it was later made into the 200<sup>th</sup> Coastal Artillery – I used to feed their horses for a nickel a day, to carry water to the horses, and grain, while they had them bivouacked there. The whole cavalry – it was still in operation, that cavalry unit, and I got a nickel a day. It all added up. They all went to [craigador] and all those guys ended up Japanese prisoners. When they disbanded the cavalry, and made it the 200<sup>th</sup> Coastal Artillery – after that, there was Pearl Harbor, and they were gone. Most of us were gone.

DD                    If I remember my geography of the University area right – where I work – Yale runs parallel to Girard, and right between Yale and Girard is the University now. What was there before?

BA                    That park was started, and there was a reservoir there.

DD                    That's it?

BA                    Yeah. Down below that, was the University; and back up this way, which would be east, there wasn't anything.

DD                    So this would be the early forties were talking about, right?

BA No, before that.

DD Okay. You're talking about your first arrival, in the twenties.

BA No, I was just a kid, really really young, in the thirties, Depression days. You did everything, you know, to work – any kind of job you could get, even the kids. I worked for bullets and beans, even, and go hunting.

DD Where would you hunt? Would you hunt on Route 66?

BA The Sandias. Walked on out to the Sandias. Used to spend days, before I got some meat.

DD What would you shoot?

BA Deer. Rabbits, deer. Anything. Anything to put with the pennies I was working for. That was the only money I got.

DD What did your folks do?

BA My dad was an ironworker, like I was later, after the war. I went to join the family in Chicago, French-Canadian-Indian tribe descent – more or less Indian. He was part of that. They were all ironworkers and steelworkers. I did my apprenticeship right after the war. Couldn't get a job in Albuquerque anywhere, so – I went to Chicago, worked my apprenticeship out there, then worked the whole country – the whole world, for that matter – after that.

DD So I'm going to ask you if you can remember the very earliest days of Route 66, when they were building the road, and later when they were paving it, in the mid-thirties. What's your first memory of Route 66?

BA Well. There's just a lot of memories – okay, I remember them coming through, in the Dust Bowl years. They chose to go through the mountains a lot, because the governor's revenge was, in 1927, he lost the election, Governor Hannett, he cut the road straight through from Moriarty to the mountains. It wasn't much of a road, but they used to take that just so they wouldn't have to make that extra jog up to Santa Fe. So they'd come straight through, and I remember them coming through on East Central – then, also remember that it wasn't paved, and I remember my father giving somebody directions, in a letter to

Chicago, or maybe even a telephone call, telling them where to turn. 'When you come to a part that's not paved, in Albuquerque, after you go through the mountains, on Central, right there is where we live.' You could spot it pretty quick. That was in the area of Columbia Avenue.

DD So when you first got here, Route 66 was just about to open up, but you were a baby, and you don't remember that, of course.

BA 1926. Actually, I'm the same age as 66 – same birthday, in fact – same year and everything.

DD So in those very early years, when you were just going to school: do you remember where your elementary school was?

BA That was University Heights, on Buena Vista.

DD And you walked there, obviously.

BA Oh, yeah. All dirt roads, everywhere.

DD And you ended up crossing Route 66 to get to elementary school?

BA No, I was on the south side of the road.

DD That gives me a sense of the geography of the road.

BA The old building is still there – sort of a – I don't know what's over there. I haven't been over there in years. Wasn't nothing much there but the school at that time.

DD So, the Depression occurs when you're three or four, and then the Okies start coming through. Is that your first memory, then, of Route 66, the Okies in those big old trucks?

BA My dad traveled it, would talk about going through the mountains. And he came out several times, setting the house up and everything. He'd always go back to Chicago to work, because there wasn't any work around here any more. He worked out here when they were building the veteran's hospital in 1932.

DD So I interviewed a guy once who was a tourist in Albuquerque, and what he remembers is that the police would stop the Okies

at night out here in Tijeras Canyon, and then in the morning, they'd let them go through.

- BA There wasn't any police out here.
- DD Well, somebody must have stopped them, because he said he remembers what he called an 'Okie parade' in the morning.
- BA Well, that probably is true. They did have sheriffs. But for years there was only one sheriff out here, and years later after the war there was Herrera, but it had been penalized – he was the only sheriff between Wyoming and Chulee.
- DD So in your very earliest memories of watching the cars go by, what did that Okie parade?
- BA They had everything. They had the rocking chairs, washtubs, chicken coops, bedsprings, all piled up on trucks and things. Real poor. Really bad shape. Barely making it, tires blowing out and everything.
- DD Was there anybody besides Okies on the road?
- BA '23 Dodge brothers, that didn't even have a job. They didn't even have Dodge brothers, then. They got out here for demonstration for people to come by and take pictures of and everything, just like that car there.
- DD Were there any people who were driving through, who weren't coming through in big trucks?
- BA There was all kinds of people driving through. Everybody was after everybody else. I always say that Route 66 was being part of the countryside, and not just zipping through a town the way it is now. People would stop alongside the road and everything, and we had, like, this 1992 tour, which was really well organized from California, that came through. I took that '54 Chevy I got sitting out there, wasn't even sure it was going to run, and I took it on that tour all the way to Santa Monica, to the end of the road. Loaded up some baling wire and took off.
- DD Getting back to the early days, were there camps in the east end of Albuquerque where people would be able to stay?
- BA Just like that picture, right there, that balancing rock, that was taken in those days, and it says "six miles to Queen's S camp,

6200 East Central.” There were camps. They would camp everywhere. Lots of times, they’d make camp down in the canyon – there’s a feedstore there now, used to be Paradise Valley Dude Ranch, where, actually, Glenn Campbell played there. There was water there, and that was a campground there.

DD What did one of these camps look like? If you could take a strolling through one of those camps, it would be really useful for us to remember.

BA People would – they were set up for camping, they weren’t about to use a hotel or anything. They all camped. The Dust Bowlers. They’d set up their tents, if they were lucky to even have a tent, or a lean-to shelter of some kind. It would always be – a couple of them would be mechanics, they’d help everybody else with whatever trouble they might be having with their vehicles. One of them would gather up firewood and get a fire going, start cooking, doing laundry. They’d have pots boiling over campfires, and people playing music at night, and trying to amuse themselves as best they could, and – I’ve often envisioned, you know, down there in downtown Albuquerque, where they’ve got those bronze statues of people right there on the street, answering questions and everything, and you walk right in amongst the people – the statues right there on Fourth and Tijeras – I’ve thought about a camp like that, out here – in fact, I’ve got room for it over there, too – and have it just like that. With an engine hanging on a tree by ropes, working on an engine, working on this, working on that. Have a camp just like one of those Dust Bowl camps, where you could actually walk right in amongst the bronze statues and everything. But with the prices of stuff like that nowadays – I doubt they would ever do that. But I kinda envision that right along here – it really happened, it’s really there. It would be all right, I think.

DD So in those early years, when you were just a kid, you’d see the Okies come through. So I guess the next era is when they started actually paving Route 66. Do you remember that at all?

BA Well. What year are you talking about?

DD Well, they finished paving 66 in 1937, but I think in New Mexico they must have been paving it in the mid 1930s.

BA I remember something about it. When the mayor of Albuquerque used to have a big argument with somebody in Texas – politic type argument – and they’d say Texas isn’t

taking care of their Route 66, not doing their job; and Texas said, well, New Mexico hasn't even paved it yet. I remember them saying that. Mayor Tingley, you know? He did that. He was governor for a while – he was governor when that was going on.

DD Do you remember the big trucks that would come in to do the paving on 66?

BA No, I didn't have much to do with those. I was seeing blasting going on, but the actual work, I didn't have much to do with that.

DD The blasting was going on out here?

BA Yeah. Tons of dynamite, getting through – even part of the canyon started. It's been like five times now that they've changed it. I don't know how many tons of dynamite – it's actually on record how many tons of dynamite were used the first couple runs of trying to get a road through here. And then the New Mexico road signs used to have printed right on them that you should stop at all the curves to listen, and honk your horn if you were going to make the curve, 'cause there wasn't room for two cars.

I took my Model A up the old La Bajada hill not to long ago. We did a little film on it. They closed it now, you can't drive it any more. I was one of the last to drive it, in the Model A two-door I got out back. It drove all the way up, and I got a little worried, to turn around and come back down. The Model A had the fuel tank, but not fuel pump, and the tank was up high. You start going up a hill like that, you start losing fuel pressure, because you're a gravity feed.

DD So do you remember the day they finished paving it through Albuquerque?

BA No.

DD You would have been – ten or eleven.

BA I don't remember any of that.

DD Did you notice any change in the traffic? At some point, maybe, the Okies stopped coming through and a more alternative –

BA I didn't pay much attention to the traffic, either. No – I did pay attention to the traffic, but I don't recall much of it. Actually, the Okies, the Dust Bowlers and what not, and travelers like that, were still going almost all the time during the war and everything. Then you had the war, and nobody had any cars – no tires, no gasoline, and they didn't make any more cars from '42 on to '45.

I remember hitch-hiking. I remember the highway totally full of soldiers and everybody trying to get back to camp or whatnot. I did too – I hitch-hiked 66 several times. If you were in uniform, and I was in uniform – I enlisted out of Albuquerque High, wasn't even graduated yet – I volunteered.

DD Do you remember those old Packards, and the big cars? Did you see those coming through?

BA Oh yeah. Used to see them all the time. 'course, the choice was Model A Fords and old Chevies, and that's what everybody had, mostly. The convoys – military convoys – used to have military plates in front and in back, and you weren't supposed to get in to pass the convoy. You might as well just wait for them to go on through, because they wouldn't let you pull into the convoy. If you had to, it was only two-lane, and it was convoy after convoy of military – it was the only way to get ordnance across the United States, was 66 then. That's the way they had to go.

DD You enlisted out of Albuquerque High – in '42 was it?

BA No, that was '43, '44.

DD Where did they send you?

BA Training in San Diego. And then South Pacific – specialty training, swimming and communications. North and South Pacific. Got sunk in Okinawa. Rammed and sunk. Commendation up there on that.

DD Then you came back to Albuquerque after the war?

BA Yeah. Well. I got discharged in California and trying to make my mind up what I was going to do and finally went to Chicago. Came back here, and then went to Chicago to work.



DD When you came back, was Albuquerque much changed?

BA Not much. Not much.

DD Do you remember any of the changes you noticed?

BA Not really.

DD When you came back here, and went to Chicago, you must have taken 66 all the way?

BA Actually, I flew. I could get – I had a special survivor’s leave papers that I would show to the pilots at the Army, or whatever, base, asking for a ride. Lot of times, they were taking planes to the junkyard to get rid of them – last trip, on their last legs – had some pretty hairy rides that way. But I had survivor’s leave, and I’d show them that, and right away, yeah, yeah, we’ll take you, come on.

DD So what was the first time after the war that you drove 66?

BA That was it, right at the end.

DD Did you drive from Albuquerque to Chicago, or did you fly?

BA I hitch-hiked from airfield to airfield, and getting rides, ‘cause I was eligible to get rides, ‘cause I was still in uniform at that time. I hitch-hiked in uniform part way – you couldn’t go all the way, some times, actually, you’d go not even the right direction, just to catch a plane ride, and get a little closer. And then triangle toward where you were going. I wanted to go to Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and then Chicago – they were getting ready to start a bunch of jobs there on iron, hot ironwork. The whole family did that.

DD Do you remember when you were actually driving on 66, not hitch-hiking?

BA I drove a ’33 Chevy all the way from California to here. There were so many trips I took, I don’t remember which is which. My first car was a ’33 Chevy.

DD What was the Mohave like to drive in those days?

BA Pretty rough. Pretty rough. It’s hot, burn your car up. And yourself. Carry extra water. Drive at night. I really didn’t have

too much trouble. I had some trouble in Oatman, I lost a tie rod coming down that Gold Road Hill. Tie rod came loose, and boy, that was....

I finally got it pulled over and used baling wire and tied it back on, and went the rest of the way.

DD As I remember, there aren't a lot of places to pull over on that road.

BA No, there isn't. I ran almost all the way down it until I found a place. I couldn't stop because the brakes wouldn't work. When I put on the brakes, the front wheels would separate, because the tie rod wasn't hooking up. I don't know if it was barbed wire, or what – but I got wire right there on the road and wired that tie rod back on. Made it to the next town. I think that was the time that – I was working on it, right on the desert, didn't have much water or anything, and a Greyhound bus stopped and asked if I needed anything. I gave 'em money for the part I needed, and he got the part at the next town, or whatever, and gave it, with directions, to the next bus driver coming back the other way. And they left the part off for me, and I put it on and went on.

DD I guess there wasn't too much out there. Let's start with Oatman.

BA I remember Oatman, because of that road, and that near accident.

DD Did they have the burros in those days?

BA They probably had them, but they were out there working, then. They weren't just hanging out in town.

DD At what point do the tourists start to come, and the travelers, sort of, go away, pretty much? The people who wanted to see America. Do you have a sense for when there were more people who were there to look around, than there were to travel through?

BA Seemed like people had a reason to get from one point to another, not just tourist traveling. I don't remember any break in that, except for more of that started when I-40 started going on through, everybody was using that. Then everybody suddenly realized it was better to go the old road to see what it

was like. And they started arranging these tours, like in 1992. I got a phone call, said, we had this tour organized, it's going to be coming through, and we're being welcome in every state, but in New Mexico there's nothing. And I thought, gee, that's like one of our fifty is missing. So I tried to arrange, at Glenrio, a welcoming station for this big Route 66 shield relay tour, and nobody paid any attention to me in New Mexico. I couldn't even get permission from the Tourism Department to use the welcoming station, which was supposed to be for welcoming and everything, and welcome these people and have a get together and everything. I had a sign from the border crossing that says stop for customs, entering the United States, and it was in Spanish and English, and my idea was to use that. But we couldn't get together anything whatsoever. I found out that the state police captain had charge of a state police car, a 1940 Chevy that was completely restored and they were proud of it, and I just called him up. And I gave up, I couldn't find anybody who would help me, organized, even give me permission. So, without permission, the whole thing was going to be nothing – I couldn't welcome all these people coming across the country – people from different countries were joining them and everything. New Mexico – just nothing.

So this state policeman, I called him up and told him there was a tour coming on 66, they're going to have a lot of old cars, and I heard you had an old car. Right away, he said, what do you want me to do? Stop the traffic on I-40 or something? I mentioned the old car, and he said, yeah, we want to show the car, I'll call somebody and call you back. And he called me back and said, I'm instructed to do anything and everything you say, and I'm in charge of the car. I said, it'd be nice to have a couple policeman out there, directing traffic in to the place, and the car can be sitting right there, no one will mess with it. I printed up – incidentally, I did all this on my own, didn't have help from anybody, no money, no anything – I printed up passports into New Mexico, and we handed out passports, and we dressed like old mountain men, and we had our stop for customs sign. Some people thought they were real! Some people from Europe said they'd never driven this far without stopping for a checkpoint anyway! And I told them, don't pet the rattlesnakes while you're in New Mexico, and save your passport or you won't get back into the United States. That was one heck of a get together there.

DD

Now that was in 1992 on the 66<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 66. I want to bring you back just a little bit earlier, before we get there, and

I'd like to talk a little bit about the traffic and how it would change, particularly out here. When did you move out to Tijeras?

- BA I was out here even during World War II, off and on. See, I traveled so much, that ironwork – you're not on the job very long. You do the framework, you do the buildings, whatsoever – towers – from one place to another. So I didn't move anywhere – I was everywhere.
- DD Where was your home? Was it out here in the canyon? You must have had some place that you came back to.
- BA I always came back to here.
- DD Tell me a little about how this area – Tijeras, Edgewood, Sedillo – came to be settled.
- BA Mostly homesteaders and cattle people and whatnot, here.
- DD Was that in the nineteenth century?
- BA Yeah.
- DD So there was –
- BA 1910, they started the main homesteading. They're still selling property – big ranches and things. I remember here, when I-40 came through, it was just silent all of a sudden. 66 made a lot of noise, and then when I-40 came through, 66 just stopped. It woke me up – just totally silent in the early morning when they finally opened up I-40. But I don't remember what year that was or anything.
- DD That would be a little later.
- BA Yeah, that's when whole towns died, then. For 66, as soon as it – in the old days, people, like over at Sedillo, moved the whole town closer to 66 so they'd have a little bit of business.
- DD Before 66 came, how did people get from this area and the ranches into town? Was there a road?
- BA Yeah. A road right through the mountain, there. But you had to be extremely careful there, like I said – there wasn't enough room for two people, two cars, on the road.

DD And then they went through this period where they blasted it open and widened it before, so that 66 could carry more traffic. These towns around here, like Tijeras and Edgewood, were they here when you got here after World War II?

BA Oh yeah. They were here. They were nothing.

DD Describe what they looked like, could you?

BA Oh, just little Spanish villages and whatnot. Tijeras was little adobe buildings along the side, some of them are still there, along the side of the road. That was it. There wasn't hardly anything.

DD How about Edgewood?

BA Edgewood wasn't even there. Barton was there.

DD Now you said Barton was one of the first towns around here.

BA Yeah, Barton was here. They had an eight-unit motel; they had the Barton Bean House; and the Dust Bowlers used to stop there, and work a little bit, and they'd hire them for sacking beans and whatnot in the Bean House – the bean factory. It's not there anymore. There's nothing there anymore. There was a school, housing for the school teacher, housing for the workers, and they'd regroup there and go on to what they called the promised land of California, do their farmwork and whatnot. But there was Moriarty – but it was Buford then.

DD What did Buford look like?

BA Just a few houses and – same thing, bean factory, bean and potato buildings.

DD That's what people were farming around here, beans and potatoes? Pintos?

BA Beans was what the whole thing was all about.

DD I wouldn't think you'd get enough rain here to farm potatoes.

BA Sure, there was rain. And then there was a big dry spell and everybody went broke. Some of them saw the future, and went ahead raising cattle, and they also had the subsidies, so they

bought out the others that were quitting. They ended up with big, big ranches – King, and all them.

DD So, now, the closest town to where we're sitting today was Barton, right?

BA This was Barton, just a mile down the road.

DD Now, you have the Barton town jail here, right next to you. What did they need a jail for?

BA Oh. **Dune**, I guess – he bought everything in the town of Dawson, northern New Mexico, the Phelps-Dodge mining town. It folded up, and he bought almost everything. He bought the jail there, and brought it here. It was Pauly Jail Company, 1890, 1900, St. Louis Missouri, but they would ship jails in fabricated pieces – you know, plates – to towns that wanted jails, and set up the porch and whatnot and put the jail together, and hand-drive hot rivets – which I did plenty of in ironwork, on bridges and stuff – I reckon I was right quick on that jail, you can see where they missed the rivets every once in a while with the sledgehammer.

DD So that's actually the Dawson town jail that was brought down here? How'd they bring a jail? On a truck?

BA Not easy, I'll tell you. It's heavy.

DD So the biggest of the East Valley towns, would that have been Tijeras?

BA Yeah.

DD Bigger than Moriarty?

BA No... Moriarty was probably bigger than Tijeras.

DD So if you were a traveler in the Forties and Fifties coming west into the canyon here, you would probably stop in Moriarty, and then where would you stop next?

BA Probably stop in Tijeras.

DD And maybe in Barton?

- BA                    There wasn't everything here to stop for. There was gasoline here, you'd stop for gasoline here.
- DD                    And then where was Albuquerque? How far out did Albuquerque go? At what point would you know you were actually in Albuquerque – built-up city?
- BA                    Considering you got, coming out of the canyon, you can see what you see now – just wide open, all of a sudden, there it is.

[MISSING SECTION]

- BA All kinds of stuff around here.
- DD So, a Dr. Cox called you.
- BA Yeah, they call him Doc Cox. He's equivalent to Johnny Carson there in London.
- DD How did he know about Route 66?
- BA I don't know. He heard about it and he wanted to...
- DD What I was asking about was, did you start a petition?
- BA Yeah. I started a petition to get all parts of 66 that had been used as 66 should remain Historic Route 66 instead of just being bulldozed, changed the name, changed the number, and everything. Sandy Starr – she's dead now, but she was with the local newspaper – she wrote a really good article on it. I just dug it out – but I don't know where I put it now. She went to Santa Fe, and I was in Santa Fe with my petition, and nobody paid much attention to me. And I said, well, I've got thirty-five hundred signatures in one week.
- DD How did you get them?
- BA Just going around everywhere, up and down 66. I just say, well, I'm trying to save 66. Oh, yeah, sure. Everyone will sign a petition about 66, that it's disappearing forever. That wasn't right. Pretty hard question to answer, but obviously, it wasn't right, to have it go into nothing and be bulldozed under and everything else, and lost, when people are looking for it from all over the country at the same time.
- DD When did people start coming here to find Route 66?
- BA They started showing up right at my door – where is 66? I told them, you're standing on it. When the signs were gone, nobody could find it then, see? And that was another thing – I wanted it re-signed and everything so that people could find it. And people wanted to travel 66. Finally I started getting some answers. This one guy in the state highway department, his job was changing the road sign numbers. He said he didn't see any sense in anybody being interested in two numbers. What's all the fuss about two numbers? I thought, wow. It's the people.



DD Did you succeed? Did they change it back to 66?

BA We finally got an audience with the governor, just pretty recently, got a picture of that, and a proclamation that it would not be changed again. It's no longer 333, it's 66. But they changed everybody's address, did a lot of weird things like that. For some reason, they just wanted it stopped. And we didn't let them stop it. Pretty good membership in New Mexico Association and other associations popped up all over the country and they were all in touch. There was even one in France, and one in Holland – a real strong one in Holland. Japanese national television was here, and we filmed for a couple days here. Took them around in my Model A up and down the road.

DD Could you remember the names of the people who were involved in the early days of the New Mexico Route 66 Association?

BA I'm not too good at names. There's past presidents and everything. See, right at first, Judy Snow was the first president, with Pete Domenici interested – I got letters from Pete Domenici, he's real interested in saving 66 and all this and that – and she actually went to Washington and was on the Senate floor talking about 66, and how it should be saved. That was one of the first ones, I guess. And there was lots of others that were president of the Route 66 Association.

DD Where was it based? Did it have a headquarters?

BA It's based right now down here at 1400 East Central.

DD In those days, when it started.

BA We started having our meetings right there at the 66 drive-in. He's been active in it all this time too.

DD Tom Willis.

BA Yeah.

DD Did you notice any change in the Association as time went on?

BA It got stronger. It got a restaurant for a while, everything was fine. And now it's kind of slacked off. I don't know if they're

losing out, or what. It just doesn't seem – there's a good magazine comes out four times a year.

DD When you started, after they closed down Route 66 and you started getting those petitions, what would people say to you if they didn't think it was worth saving Route 66? What would they say?

BA Nobody ever said anything like that.

DD Really. Why do we have a Route 66 Association but not, say, a New Mexico 85 Association?

BA I don't know.

DD Why should somebody care more about 66 than any other road?

BA 'cause it was a ribbon of history. Ribbon of history across the United States. It was the first road you could get from one place to another on. I got a poem about that, that Route 66 was a ribbon of history, and that it should be forever saved and signed for you to see.

DD Do you have that poem handy? Could you read it to me?

BA I just did.

DD That's it?

BA Yeah.

DD So everybody was always supportive of your efforts –

BA And then the other one that I had of the same thing was it was – 66 was being part of the countryside.

DD What does Route 66 mean to you?

BA Now that it's all saved and everything, and it's signed – not really very good. We had signs placed through legislature and everything, all paid for, extra signs, placed on the highway – and they were all stolen and never replaced. That's sad. There's a few left, but very few. But that was good. And now, say, it's pretty well saved. It's a well-known thing, documented and everything, and people like you and whatnot are all the time.

DD What do you think the future of Route 66 is?

BA Right like it is, just to be an historic highway.

DD You think somebody ought to make a big old park out of it and open a theme park?

BA No. That's 2400 miles. It's already a theme park. You can drive it. You can make a tour of it. And that's what people do. I was impressed when some of the guys in the 1992 tour – there were some younger guys in there that had never known 66 in its heyday or anything, but they were in this tour. They had older cars and whatnot, and a lot of us would get motel rooms and whatnot, and this one kid, he wouldn't get a motel room, he wanted to camp out like the old-timers did and experience the old way, what they went through and everything. He wanted to run the highway that way, all the way across – and he did. He had everybody sign his car with permanent markers – Bobby Troup signed his car, wrote 'Get Kicks on Route 66' on it. I met him in Santa Monica at the end of the tour.

DD Do you ever meet young people today interested in Route 66?

BA Oh, yeah. People stopping all the time here. They're taking pictures, stop here all the time. Young and old.

DD What's the youngest person that's stopped in here to ask you about Route 66?

BA I don't know – there's been so many. This is a kind of "must stop" deal in all the publications everywhere else. It's just – people – let me get Michael Wallis's book. He's the first one to write anything very big and very good on it. Michael Wallis – the Route 66 Casino, on the back wall of the restaurant, go right on in past all the food and anything to the back wall to the right, there's kind of a dining room before, and there's a big print of that picture right there. And it's a big one – three by two – on the wall there.

DD You're looking like a tough hombre there.

BA I got my six-gun on.

DD Tell me about your project to stencil the signs on Route 66.

BA I ran across that – they did that in the Cajon Pass in California. I had friends in southern California, past president, Joann and Jeff Willis, and he wrote a good song, too, about 66 – a very good one. Part of it, one verse, says, in the drive-in theater where I used to score, please don't let them make it a discount store. Good song.

They're good at preserving – better than we are – at preserving old places. I was impressed. I was staying with Joann Willis in southern California at Santa Ana when they – we were going down the road to meet somebody, or something, and she stopped and there was this Orange Julius, and she said, "That's the last one," and it was all caved in on one side and they had it roped off and they had just begun reshoring it and they were trying to save it. The same as saving the highway. Restoration and whatnot. But it was the last one left. And it makes you think – you wouldn't think they'd be gone in antiquity. But now, what I say about, like, stenciling the highway, they started doing that in Cajon Pass in California, they put up signs, highway signs, and they'd steal them right away, 'cause it was a good place for stealing signs, so they started stenciling 'em, and we thought that was a good idea, so we did that, and I built a stencil that's the exact shape and size of the old 66 shield and the letters are the exact shape. People who didn't notice until recently have been bringing attention to the fact that even that old design, the original design, and the artwork, is gone in antiquity already, because there's nobody who knows there was even any difference. They just make plain sixes, and that's it. Our stencils will have to be the exact shape and everything, so I made the stencils.

DD Where have you put them down?

BA They just put blacktop here. There used to be some right here.

DD Where else have you stenciled?

BA Los Lunas has got 'em on all four corners downtown. They got 'em in Gallup, and I think they got 'em in Grants.

DD And that's your stencil?

BA Yeah.

DD Where is it now?

BA My stencil? One of them's in the back seat of my car.

DD Do you ever just go and put them up yourself?

BA I just put one on the table in Trujillo's restaurant in Edgewood. Big round table there, and the table needed painting, and we painted it white and the sign fit perfect on that table.

DD How far down is that from here?

BA Four miles.

DD I'll have to go visit it and see. You also started the Route 66 Chamber of Commerce. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

BA There's a lot there. He's got a business on the other side of Edgewood, and he calls it Deadwood, and he wanted to get in on this and do some work on it and everything, so we just started a Chamber of Commerce for Route 66.

DD And what does it do?

BA Exactly what we did: we started the stenciling, audience with the governor, we got that proclamation that they wouldn't be changing the numbers.

DD Is it still active, the Route 66 Chamber of Commerce?

BA It's still active, yeah.

DD Who's in charge?

BA Right now, Bill Gilmore is the president, in Edgewood. Jerry Ueckert and me.

DD I have one question. I've always wondered, what makes somebody care about the past to the point where they want to get active in it?

BA You feel like you're being piled on, more or less, like... like this shouldn't be, just forget about something that was so big, and – at the same time, people are coming from all over the world to just drive on our highway and we can't see the forest for the trees. And they want to drive on 66 – they don't want to drive on I 40.

DD How come you figure it was somebody like you who was involved in getting these efforts going here in Tijeras Canyon and not a hundred people?

BA Oh, I don't know.

DD Why you?

BA I don't know. I just kept after it. And that's what happened.

DD The other people who joined your association – what do they have in common?

BA They're interested in preserving and whatnot.

DD But how come?

BA Why is anybody? That's almost an impossible question to answer.

DD I mean – I just look around, and I see some people who are really concerned about the past, and keeping it alive, and some people who just want to run right over it.

BA That's true.

DD What's the difference between these people?

BA I just don't know.

DD Do I have your permission to transcribe this interview and deposit it in archives?

BA Oh yeah. Anything go with it?

DD A lot of other interviews, with a lot of other people.

BA I know when I get into, on the computer, into the park service when you called. They have pictures of different places, up and down, through New Mexico.

DD It would be great to have your pictures. I guess the question is, at some point, would you be willing to part with them, so we can put them in the University? The University's building a collection now of Route 66 materials, and they're putting up exhibits, and I know they would be interested in all these

articles and photographs you have. Do you think you'd be interested in letting them have them at some point?

BA Yeah.

DD Okay.

BA If I get them back, they can copy them. Some of my stuff is already in the Albuquerque Museum.

DD Good. Okay. We're going to end it off here, but I'm going to ask you for the phone number of your daughter, because I think I might like to interview her as well. Okay?

BA She doesn't know anything about it.