

## **Buz Waldmire: Springfield, IL**

Transcribed by Nora Hickey

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DAVID DUNAWAY

I'm wondering how you came to live on Waldmire Road in Rochester?

BUZ WALDMIRE

Well, this dates back prior to the 911 system, and when there wasn't a 911 system and there was an emergency the local ambulances or fire departments pretty much knew where everyone lived. When they went into a 911 system, and I don't know what was involved with that, if they had to pass legislation or whatever, but they set it up they said well, where do these people live, how do we give them an address?

And somebody says, I know let's call the power company! So they called the electricity company, and they had specific records and street locations for every transformer that they hung throughout the county and in the area. It just so happened that my dad was really one of the first people out here, so when the power company came out and hung the transformer and put in the electric for the house way back in the woods, they identified it as Waldmire Road. And, like I said, all around the county, you'll see people's names on road signs, and that's a specific designation, and so, because we owned the property at that time, 911 was developed, that's how they got the name. They just took it from the power companies.

DD

That's great! Now this is...your dad...how far did he grow up from here?

BW

Oh, about 30 miles.

DD

And, let's see, why did he move down to South 6<sup>th</sup> street on Route 66?

Well, my Dad grew up in Petersburg, and then it wasn't long after that, that he moved to Springfield on a farm on Old Chattam road, that part of Springfield. My Grandpa worked for Bernard Investment Company, and it was one of the farms he rented from Joe Bernard, from Bernard investment company, and so then my father continued to grow up here in Springfield, and attended Springfield High school.

While he was growing up on Old Chattam road, after they had moved from Petersburg, then he was very entrepreneurial. He played in the band, at the high school, he had milk cows, he had a milk route, delivered butter and cream. I don't know if he had a paper route or not, but he was always doing something, you know.

He got out of High school, he went to Junior College here in Springfield, IL, and from there he went up to Galesburg, IL and attended Knox College, where he met my mother, and he had some good friends in the bakery business and other things like that.

While he was in Galesburg, he opened up a small restaurant, off campus, called the Goal Post. And he would work for a semester at the restaurant, and not go to school, and save up some money, and then one of his other buddies would run the restaurant while he went to school, and so the three or four of them took turns over the few years to get through college.

When he graduated Knox college he had a couple of dollars in his pocket after paying everything. Not too many people back then, in the 30's and 40's, could go to college and come away with more money than they went there with. While this was going on, my grandfather continued to work for Joe Bernard, and upon his retirement, they didn't have a retirement program, Joe Bernard gave my Grandfather several properties. One of them was the house on 6<sup>th</sup> Street, one was on State Street. (There was another one, and I can't remember where that was now.)

And so, my Grandpa moved into the house on 6<sup>th</sup> Street, and then later on, Mom and Dad came back to Springfield, they moved to the duplex on State Street that Joe Bernard had given them and they rented out the other half of it, and then my Dad and my Mother lived in the house on 6<sup>th</sup> Street, and eventually bought from his dad. That's how we ended up on 6<sup>th</sup> Street.

DD Now, that was about a mile or so north of the Cozy Dog...

BW Uh it would be about 3 miles.

DD 3 miles...then your dad set up a bunch of hot dog restaurants?

BW He owned those in 1946...prior to that, when he graduated from Knox College and went to the University of Illinois and majored in Agricultural Science, then he too got drafted, and he ended up spending his time in Amarillo, TX.

While he was in Amarillo, TX, always looking for the next new thing out. And he came up with the idea, and I don't know...it makes a good story to say he invented the corn dog, I don't know if he actually did, I think, it was invented by different people at different times throughout the country. But it certainly was a food product that you could get baked in a cornbread pan, you know a

hot dog or sausage covered with cornbread, then you bake it, and you got a corn dog. Well, he wanted to figure out a way where he could make them quick, and so his college buddy in Galesburg, IL, Don Strand, whose father, like I said, owned the bakery, came up with a concoction that you mix it with water and you dip the wiener in it, and you cook it in hot oil (lard back then) and it was a corn dog.

And he set up the restaurant while he was still in the Army down there, and he sold the USO club, what he called “Crusty Curs” – C-U-R-S, as in a crunchy dog, and made money down there too, got discharged from the army, came back to Springfield, and was just gung ho about setting the world on fire.

So he opened up a little cozy dog stand, on MacArthur Blvd, in South Central Springfield, and brought with him a friend of his that he’d met from GB, a guy by the name of Gilbert Stein, who was one of the founders of this soft serve ice cream called Dairy Queen.

So my dad and he both put up little bitty restaurant there, Daddy sold cozy dogs and Mr. Stein sold Dairy Queen, and Mr. Stein never really I think managed, individually managed the restaurants like my Dad did. But, it went so well that he scouted another location. And so he opened up a cozy dog house on South Grand, which was more in a heavier traffic area, and he was friends with all the local restaurant people back then. He didn’t want to sell a traditional hamburger, he wanted to sell a crumbly hamburger and call it a Chili-wich. That didn’t go over very well.

So, he had those two restaurants, and then they were scouting around for a third one, and he and Mr. Stein found an old farmhouse, there, on South 6<sup>th</sup> Street, 2900 block of South 6<sup>th</sup>, and they bought it, and they put up a restaurant, and Mr. Stein built the Dairy Queen, and my dad built the Cozy Dog restaurant, and they went in halves, and paid for a roof to connect the two buildings. It was very popular, very successful, so successful in fact, for several years he was open for 24 hours a day.

DD

Your dad?

BW

Yeah, because Route 66 was it. I mean you had the bypass around town, you had 31<sup>st</sup> street, which is now a major bypass, and you had Lynn Street, which is now Stevenson Drive, but if you were coming in from Chicago, or north of Springfield, you’d come down old route 66, and you’d drive all the way through town,

down Main St, which is called Peoria Road. You'd wind down on 6<sup>th</sup> Street, and you'd go south, and the Cozy Dog was one of the last places you'd see leaving town, conversely, one of the first places you'd see coming into town from the south. And it was kind of a goldmine.

So, he let the other two restaurants go, and just focused everything on this hustling and bustling new location, and that was in 1949, is when he built that restaurant, and opened up. I think they held their grand opening in September of 1950, so that pretty much does that, and along the same time period, in 1946, he introduced Cozy Dogs to the Illinois State Fair. That was the first time the IL State Fair had ever seen a corn dog.

And, the next year there were more, and so he went into the business of building concession stands and travel trailers, along with doing all that other stuff, and staying actively involved in politics, in campaigning for Eisenhower, and then Adelaide Stevenson, and the United World Federalists, he just had his fingers in a lot of different things. And anyways, that's how we ended up on 6<sup>th</sup> St.

DD

Why Cozy Dogs? I mean, you said he tried the Chili-wich, which didn't go over too big...why did he decide to make that his signature product?

Well Cozy Dog became his signature product, because, like I said, he started in Amarillo Air Base with it, calling them Crusty Curs, and he brought it back here. And his first opening, was at the Lake Springfield Beach house, where he sold Cozy Dogs. My mother insisted on a different name, and that's what they came up with.

And they were very popular, and a big hit, so he was Mr. Cozy Dog, and that was his signature, that was his, you know, that's what fronted and drove everything else. And he always wanted to do something different. And the cozy dogs were different, and they took off, they caught on.

The Chili-wich didn't catch on, people still wanted a hamburger. And nobody would come, he always wanted to satisfy as many people as possible. So you go into some restaurants now, and they've got everything from...your heart's desire, they can create it.

Now, he did tell me one time about a restaurant in Galesburg called the Ham and Egger, and they were open 24 hours a day, it

was near campus, and they did a land office business, and you went in there and you got ham and eggs. You didn't get bacon and eggs, you didn't get sausage and eggs, you didn't get grits, you got ham and eggs, that was it, it was called the Ham and Egger. And the other man focused on the one thing he was good at.

DD Well, maybe you could describe the physical layout of that first store, which is no longer there, I believe...

BW Are you referring to the store on South 6<sup>th</sup> Street?

DD South 6<sup>th</sup> Street... describe the physical layout of that first restaurant.

BW Well my dad always fancied himself an efficiency expert. So he wanted everything so that it was easily accessible. Now business was so good, when he opened up, that particular restaurant built and opened in '49, and grand-opened in '50, served Cozy Dogs, French fries, hamburgers. Dairy Queen served no food, and he served no ice cream, and of course soda pops and stuff. Along with that you had to have coleslaw, you had to have potato salad, you had to have chili.

I mean Springfield, IL is by some considered the chili capital of the world, based on which history book you read. And...so as he had more items than just a cozy dog for sale, he had to have an area to make cozy dogs. He had to have an area to cook the hamburgers, he had to have an area that would blend in and still be able to cook French fries, and so in terms of the physical restaurant, you would come in the front door, and you would go up to the window at that point there were windows...actually there were no front doors when he first opened, it was just all open.

And it was too cold the first winter, and I digress. So he had kind of an H-shaped kitchen, with the lines of the letter H would pretty much be the pathways that people would walk from station to station to prepare the food. And then serve it to the customer and take their money. And the kitchen area behind that H was kind of like a U, where everything just kinda flowed.

Business was so busy that he needed a person making Cozy Dogs all the time. He needed somebody standing there making French fries. He needed the third person to make the hamburgers, he needed the 4<sup>th</sup> person to take the orders and/or take the money. He needed the 5<sup>th</sup> person to do clean-up. Consequently, that's how it

sort of evolved as he went through various remodels, because he needed all those different people to run all those different stations.

DD And the customer area, what was that like? Was it mainly drive-thru, or was it...

BW It had no drive-thru. We called it a drive-in, but we didn't have curb service, we didn't carry it out to people. You pulled up to the building, and you got out of your car, and you walked up to the window, and the window would be slid open, and take your order, and fix it and give it to you, and you'd go sit down in the dining room.

That first winter, it was cold, and there was no heat in there, and no doors, it was just an open area, they closed the back end for a wind break. Business was good, but they thought, Wow, we need to close in the front and out a door on it, and put some heat in there, and, again, that led to longer hours, just more expansion. The restaurant underwent probably 4 major expansions over the years that it was there.

DD Now that sounds like...5 full time people, that sort of sounds like one of the bigger restaurants in SF at the time.

BW It was, and you had those five full time people were mostly cooks. Slash servers. We didn't have waitresses, there was no waiting tables or anything like that, so yeah, it was a major thing back then.

DD Did it change much over the years?

BW When DQ went from serving ice cream to food, because there was a lot of profit in DQ, but there was a lot of profit in food. A lot of times today, people don't understand how much food costs. You know, you go to the carnival or fair, you spend three dollars for a corn dog. They probably have 15 cents in it as an actual food cost, but the cost of the taxes, the overhead, the fees, and everything else, jump it way up there. But the actual food cost is low, on some things.

And, if I step back a little bit, that's one of the main reasons Cozy Dog was a staple, because he could cook 'em so many at a time, and he used to run his slogans: "Get your red hot Cozy Dogs! One calls for another, eat 'em on the run, they're a lot of fun!" He was an old carnival barker too, I can hear him now.

So it did change, and I guess the significant change that happened in the food business, along with McDonald's opening up down the street in 1956, (we doing ok on time?) was the Eisenhower initiative to build long stretches of highway to crisscross the United States, to also allow us to mobilize for better defense in case being attacked by a foreign country and stuff, so the highways can double as runways kind of a thing, and so, as the interstate program progressed, that was the main shift in the traffic flow. Cause pretty soon, when the interstate went around the east side of SF, we didn't have that major 24 hour traffic in front of the restaurant.

So early on, he would stay open 24 hours a day, and then he started closing at 1 o'clock in the morning, or midnight, eleven o'clock, you know, ten o'clock through the week, ten o'clock Friday and Saturday. So that was the major shift; you know, business dropped, night business dropped off considerably. As with more expansion out west in SF and the fast food restaurants popping up around and stuff. So, it was always a struggle for him to want to stay on top.

And, a little bit of history that's not really talked about too much is his continual search for the next big thing. He had a, he was roasting hens, chickens, he tried catering, we had a great big giant pizza oven, he would cater Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners, he would, we did Mexican food for awhile, along with everything else, he was always constantly trying.

One of my favorites was he liked to serve a dinner lunch, or supper dinner, instead of just feeding us food, he'd go in there at dinnertime, or at lunchtime, and he'd have those electric skillets lined up on the counter, next to the Cozy Dog fire, so whoever was cooking Cozy Dogs could fry the chicken, pan fry the chicken, and we'd have the chicken up there in a cooler, and we'd bread it and stick it in the hot grease on the electric skillet, and we'd fry chicken, and serve chicken dinners with mashed potatoes and beans and stuff. So, it was the interstate highway system that changed the whole, you know, that changed the business.

DD

Let's talk a little about that, because that's a really important point. I guess that Eisenhower movement was starting in the mid 50's, and when did it get to Springfield, do you remember about when the first bypasses were...?

BW

Yeah, I'm thinking 1960...2? 3?



DD Ok, and do you remember how it felt when, you know, the freeway was taking that, in the beginning, when the freeway was taking that traffic away? Did you notice it the first day?

BW No, because it wasn't like throwing a switch. I mean, as they constructed parts of this highway system, people were still used to driving through town. I think it took place over a period of a year.

DD How did you notice that there was less traffic? How could you see it?

BW We saw it in the night visits. We didn't really notice it during the day, we had a regular breakfast crowd and we had a really good lunch crowd, because right across the street from the restaurant was a very busy factory, called Alice Charmers, and later on it became Fiat Alice. But, and so, there was a lot of people there.

My Dad...they would go on strike now and then, and I can remember my Dad seeing the guys on the strike, standing around a burn barrel, you know, striking, and he's take doughnuts out to them. You know, he'd serve them doughnuts and stuff. My dad was always one for giving something away. He wasn't really a churchgoer, but, I mean, if you tie it to the Church whatever you give comes back tenfold. And, that was his...he always believed that word of mouth and kindness would lead to success. And I think he's right, that's the way to do it.

DD So, come '62, '62, when you're beginning to shut down the night business, the day business is still pretty consistent because that's probably local traffic, a lot of it, like people from the factory?

BW Well, from the factory, and other people as business began to spread out, and, you know, my dad was such a people person, and always food quality, you know, was always important to him, and I don't know how you are, but if you find a place that has really good food, you know, you don't find bones in your fish, or you don't find chunks of gristle every time you take a bite, you go back to that place, because more than price, you want consistency of quality, and so, we developed a good breakfast crowd, a good lunch crowd, and a supper crowd.

We had good suppers. It was after the supper crowd, after the 7:30, 8:30, 9 o'clock, it was after that point, that it really just kind of shut down, you know.

DD So, did you notice a change in the kind of customers when you were no longer on the thru road?

BW You know, I wish my dad were here to answer that. Uh, I can't say that I did. I mean, I was just a teenager.

DD How did that... If I can bring you back to those days, what'd South 6<sup>th</sup> street look like in those days, what was there?

BW I remember South 6<sup>th</sup> St, was two way traffic, it's one way now, and it has been for what most people can remember. But I remember it as a two-way street, I remember it being all brick and I did grow up on Route 66, and we used to play car tag.

DD How do you play car tag?

BW Well, you stand in the front yard, and you look at the cars, and you identify the car that's coming, whether it's a ford, Chevy, Buick, Cadillac, Nash, Studebaker, whatever, and you, there's half a dozen boys out there, could be a girl or two, I don't remember them, and you identify the car, and you race back and you touch the tree before anybody else can get to it and that's how you get your points.

DD *How about license plates? Did you notice the out of state traffic, the out of state licenses?*

BW I never paid any attention, I really never did.

Do you know where most of the... you know some people distinguish between travelers and tourists, the traveler is the one that has to go down the road, and the tourist is the one that wants to go down the road. Who were you getting? In the 60's.

I don't think there was a big tourist thing, but I could be wrong. I was a teenager then. I think we got travelers, a lot of local business, which kept us going, and we got travelers. I don't know that SF was a destination for anybody that was... there might have been some with the Lincoln home, and the New Zion/Zealand? State Park, out south of Petersburg.

But, I don't know that Springfield... Springfield had the State Fair, so that was always a busy time, it was a destination during the summer, because of the State Fair. I just don't, I don't know how to answer that, I'm sorry.

DD

*That's OK, that's fine. Well...what were the other businesses that you remember on the South side.*

BW

Well, around where I grew up, there was some gas stations, there was a liquor store, um...we'd go in the liquor store on a regular basis, we'd take our wagon around the block, two blocks, three blocks, we traveled all over the neighborhood with our bikes or our wagons we'd gather some bottles and take em in, and we'd get...I forget now, I think the great big coke bottles, they were like quart size, heavy glass, I think we'd get a nickel for those, and maybe two cents for the other ones, the other glass bottles, and we'd buy pickles and other snack food and stuff.

There was a gas station, there were...they didn't have businesses that were run out of a house, today I see a lot of businesses that you can tell, that used to be somebody's house, but now it's a business, whether it's a lawyer's office or an antiques shop or a hairdresser's or whatever. SO, it was mostly all residential where I grew up.

Now, where the restaurant was, I remember when the McDonald's went up, and there was a gas station there near it, there was a motel near it, there were several motels there. There was a cleaner's, later on a lumberyard went in. Alice Charmers went in across the street, so there wasn't anything there, I remember when Kentucky Fried Chicken built across from Cozy Dog, on the next corner, and they were there for a long time. It's now a bank.

And this pre-dated, I want to say it pre-dated the mini-strip mall. I don't know when they came about, but they weren't there then. Kmart, I remember when the Kmart was built and opened up, and that was a big thing. Downtown people were just aghast at that, because I remember going Christmas shopping downtown Springfield to stores like Crosby and Woolworth's and Robert's Bros, and Meijer's Bros, larger department stores, Berdner;s. I don't know if I've answered your question...

DD

*You have, you're giving me a sense for what South 6<sup>th</sup> St was like during these times. That's really important for us to know, because South 6<sup>th</sup>, you know the local history is very tied to the Route 66 history as well. I'm just wondering all these travelers, when you were teenagers, you were working in the shop? I mean in the restaurant...?*

BW

Yeah, I...in the interview you did with Bob, there's references to how as little kids we worked in there, swatting flies or wiping

tables, so I spent almost my whole childhood by spanning that restaurant. I mean, there were times when I'd play at home with the neighborhood kids, but, I loved the restaurant and I was always in there.

I mean, I can remember standing on a metal milk crate, not a plastic one, so I could work the cash register. And I had to stand on my milk crate to work the grill. I'd have to stand on a milk crate when I'm back there frying hamburgers for people, and you couldn't get away with that today, you know, let little kids do that.

*DD* *Do you have any stories about the travelers who were doing Route 66?*

*BW* Can you give me a time frame?

*DD* *Well, I'm thinking when you were starting to be a teenager, or in that area? I mean you must have met people from all over the country, I'm just wondering if any of them stuck with you.*

*BW* I don't remember any travelers doing Route 66 that stuck with me. What stuck with me was the local customers. The people that lived in the area, that came in all the time. The people who worked and were regular customers, and then retired and became a more regular customer.

We had some customers that my dad just gave the key to, you know, Old Dust Nichols was... I think he worked at Weavers... he'd get there before any of my Dad's workers would get there, and he'd make the coffee and open up the doors and stuff, and turn the heat up, and when my Dad would get there, everything would be there, you know, so he'd... the key to the business he would give to different customers.

This is really... I don't mean to digress, but when my wife and I bought that restaurant, in 1975, actually 1976 was the first time we opened it, cause my dad was done with it, we spent January and February cleaning and painting. It hadn't been done in years.

And, I don't know if you've been to the restaurant recently, but she's done a great job of keeping it pristine, clean, neat, organized, she's very good with that. And, I'd never, I mean I'd worked in a restaurant, but as far as managing one, hiring people and paying people to do stuff, so... but I can remember going in there early in the morning and making doughnuts, and being busy in the back, either fixing the chili, getting that ready, the chicken, the meat,

sticking the hot dogs, doing the potatoes, cause we, even today, we still cut potatoes everyday for French fries, a daily thing,

I'd put the cash tray out on the counter, and the doughnuts were a nickel, or a quarter, twenty cents, I can't remember now, I'd have to ask Sue, but for some of the early morning customers that would come in and just want coffee and/or a doughnut, they'd cut their stuff and pay for it themselves all on the honor system, and I did that for months. It was just the nature of the type of people we had, the customers that there were.

DD Now, you said you took over in '75, '76, what had happened between, say, the 60's and the arrival of the interstate, up to that point, what was the next chapter like? It sounds like there's more local people...

BW Yeah...yeah...

DD *How did your Dad decide to leave the business?*

BW I worked, I pretty much worked full time during the summers through high school, and a lot of hours during school. And then of course I went to Junior College, which kept me here post high school for a couple more years, and I don't want to discount the time spent working there by my two little brothers, Jeff and Tom, they worked there with me.

He continued to operate the restaurant and continued to try to do things...I think he got tired. You know, I left Junior College, and I went up to Knox College, and when I got out of Knox College I started working for the school district and looked at my student deferment, it wasn't good anymore, and the school district didn't want to hire me full time, cause they didn't know I was married and had a baby.

And so, I got drafted. And then, I enlisted in the Air Force instead of went into the Army, I wanted better sheets and didn't want to crawl around in the mud. So while I was in the service, and I was there until '72, I was in Texas a couple of times, in a couple different bases...boy you're taking me back down memory lane...I came back home in '72 and worked for him for awhile, but he had a pretty good crew, and the night business was almost non-existent, I mean after 8:30, 9 o'clock, he'd started closing earlier.

I had a wife and a baby to support, so I started going back to school, and what is now UIS Springfield, but back then was

Sangma State University. So I was going to school and I was working for the, a little bit for the school district but on a part time basis, I worked for a rehab, Macon County Rehab for awhile, and then I had problems in my, our marriage, and we got divorced, and I was at odds and ends, and still going to school I think, and working at the restaurant, spelling my Dad, he didn't like to go in that much, he liked to show up at lunchtime and fry a few hamburgers, or fry a few cozy dogs, and then visit with all the customers, and then go home.

He didn't want to stay there in the morning, all day, he was done with that. But he was busy, he was always building. He built a house out here, and then he built another house, and then he built another house, he accumulated more stuff and then he'd build another barn, and when that one got full, he'd build another one. He was always building something. It might be genetic. So he was never really idle.

DD

*We were talking about how you came to run the business...*

BW

Yeah, I'd gotten divorced from my first marriage, I had two children and my ex-wife got married right away. Kind of a cute story there, she got married at 4PM on December 31<sup>st</sup>, which, at least in the state of Illinois, in San County, really caused me some significant tax consequences, in terms of deductions, well, yeah that was a financial loss to me. Not to mention the whole marriage thing and everything.

I started working full time at the restaurant and taking care of that, and that's where I met my wife, Sue, and she was working there, she was a kid and, I don't know, whirlwind romance or whatever, we got along well, and so we got married. Had a big wedding, and I was getting ready to think about my future and what I wanted to do, and figured well, maybe I'll go back in service.

Cause I could do that, I mean, when I got out of the air force, in '72, I joined the National Guard and stayed there, that was in Peoria, and then I transferred to Springfield later, and my dad came in one time and he says, he says, "Well, I'm gonna sell the restaurant." He says, "why don't you rent it for a year?" I said, "ok." And we talked about and we said, ok, we'll rent it for a year.

So we did, and then one year led into another and to another, and it became need to own kind of a thing, and that's how we ended up with it. I never did go back in service, I stayed in the guard and retired out in '93 or 4.

DD

*Around the time you're buying this restaurant, Route 66 is beginning to change. It's pretty much closed down, not entirely, but getting there, and I'm just wondering when you begin to see the tourists show up.*

BW

When we bought the restaurant, back in '76, I was still, you know I had two kids from my previous marriage, we spent a lot of time trying to see them and manage that part of our lives, as well as the restaurant, and the people, my wife and I worked side by side, and we didn't always work well together, I would do things she didn't like, or she would do things I didn't like, nothing that we would really fight about, I don't think, I'd have to ask her that question, but certainly we had different ways of doing things, and I was very strong-willed, I was, and I guess maybe I was controlling too.

Always felt, well, I have reasoned this out, my way is the best way because of this and this and this! You know, so I wasn't real good at the emotive process that comes naturally for women. Then we had kids, the twins were born in '81. Five years later, another one, and a few years later another one.

And my dad, I was not...you know I was busy with military to the point that I was working so much out there, more than one weekend a month, two weekends a month and sometimes extra duty, that I just said, that's it, I can't do Sundays anymore, so I just closed up on Sundays. That was it, you know it was crazy.

I'd go in there Sunday morning at 6 o'clock in the morning and get everything ready and get it started and get it open and go out to the airport and do my drill duty and then get to the restaurant at 5:30, 6 o'clock at night and stay until 9:30, 10 o'clock Sunday night, you know, so I just said that's it, Sundays are done, and haven't opened up on Sundays since! But I, I don't think I paid any attention to that.

I was focused on regular business, I was focused on maintaining what we had, and it wasn't until the late 80's that Bob, my brother Bob, and my dad, and I think my dad was the first one, cause Bob was traveling around doing calendar posters for different college towns and stuff, but my dad saw that Route 66 was gonna be something, and I don't know where that started.

He was a visionary, my dad was, and I guess I kinda rode along on his coattails and, you know, he made phone calls, he made

arrangements, he was a promoter, another hat my dad wore, he was a master promoter, master promoter.

And as the Route 66 Association in IL was formed and I don't know when it was formed, certainly I think a man by the name of Angel Delgadilo was one of the founding members of the movement to, if not restore, to popularize route 66 again, as something worth saving. And it kind of bled from there. And, I think one of the people instrumental in Route 66 in IL, was Tom Teague, who you may not know him at all

DD

*Oh, I know him well...*

BW

Ok, and I think Tom was such an insightful, forward thinking person, at the same time wanting to preserve, you know, things the way they were.

He was a mover, and it was my Dad's relationship with Tom Teague and everything else, and I think my dad saw dollar signs and, I don't think, this probably isn't nice, but I don't think he really cared one way or another about Route 66, other than that he was probably very thankful that Route 66 in Springfield remained a main artery through the city.

It didn't in a lot of cities. You know in a lot of cities, businesses dies as a result of that. But, Springfield was fortunate. But, I think my dad just saw dollar signs.

DD

Now, he no longer owned the restaurant?

BW

No, he was in there all the time. I mean, he would come in and pass out doughnuts. Funny story about my dad, we were there working during lunch one day, this is in the late 80's early 90's, uh late 80's probably and my dad had a, once he got his beard he finally just kept it and everything, I guess he liked that.

It was easier to shave just by coming down the sides and the top of the cheeks, you know and the mustache, than trying to do all this other stuff down here. So, he had one of those, the beard that covered from the sideburns down around the chin area and underneath. He came into the restaurant one time, he's looking around, everything's going, he takes his hands and he sticks them on the cozy dogs that are in a pan underneath the heat light, cause we make our Cozy Dogs and put them in a stainless steel pan on a grate underneath an infrared heat lamp, keep 'em hot, you know, and check things out, you know, and I learned, I never contradicted



him, I never told him what to do or anything like that, I turned around and I said “Yes, Ma’am, can I help you?” and she said, “I want two cozy dogs, but I don’t want any of those cozy dogs that that old man put his hands all over!”

And she said it real loud like that, and my dad just walked in the back, he didn’t say anything. He never talked about it. But that was kinda funny. I said, “Yes, ma’am, absolutely ma’am.” I made her some fresh ones.

DD So when do you remember someone coming in and saying, “oh, is this the place?” You know, they’re coming from California, they’re coming from Japan, they’re coming from...

BW That started happening in ’90... ’89 and ’90 is when that started happening. And that was when the Route 66 Association of Illinois decided to have their tour, their Chicago to St. Louis run. And they had a special gate, and they got sponsors from maybe Chevrolet, or the Corvette Club, or different associations. And they even set a gate up, they constructed a gate, and all the cars would come through this gate and get a stamp and they’d disassemble it and go on down to the next location 50 miles away and set it up and come through and they’d stamp there.

And Cozy Dog for several years was one of the main stops. On their “Fun Run Tour.” And the Route 66 “Fun Run Tour” when it started, if Bob were here he could really answer that question, I’m woefully ignorant on a lot of those details. And, that’s kinda solidified the relationship between Route 66, Cozy Dog, and my dad’s interviews, inventing the corn dog on Route 66.

Because, he used to say, well the Cozy Dog was born in Route 66 in Texas, moved to Springfield, had its home in Springfield, IL on Route 66. He was quite a spinner, my dad was. SO that pretty much cemented our tie to the Route 66, and the fact that we’d been there since the ‘40’s.

DD Now, this must be a very different kind of customer than the customers that had the key to the door and all of that...

BW Customers started changing in the early part of the 90s, to the point now, where the current Cozy Dog does a good lunch business, dinner business, afternoon business. But there’s a good percentage of that, are people traveling the highway. And, wanted to come in.

Now, we have a guest register there, it was one of my lists to compile a guest register, like my brother Bob had done, and track where people where from and put them on the map, organize it. And I think Sue is wanting to do that. She's got her hands full, too, trying to catalogue that.

I almost want to say that probably 60% of our business are local regulars, and 35-40% are traveling tourists on the highway, and many of those are repeat travelers. Every time we come to Springfield...you know. Route 66 is different because, because people go to see Niagara Falls, they go there, they spend some time there, they see, they take lots of pictures they go home, they don't go back to Niagara Falls.

Well, maybe later, when their kids are grownup or whatever...or take their grandkids or something. Route 66 tourists are people who might drive take two or three days and drive a stretch of it, and go back home, and then next summer, do it again. You know, or in the winter plan another week, take another segment.

So it's a, it takes a long time to see the highway. And, which helps us out as a business along the highway, cause we keep getting that repeat business.

DD Were you surprised, I mean, the busses of course you were expecting them, you were all prepares, etc., but I'm just wondering, what about when someone from England shows up and orders a Cozy Dog, in the early '90's...

BW Oh, and I loved it. I loved...that's the one part of the business that I do miss the most, is not talking to all the visitors from different parts of the world. Because I always just love that, and I made a lot of good friends, England, Japan, Germany, you know, so...

DD Do you remember the first time you were sitting there and somebody really different seemed to show up, you know, with a funny accent, or something like that?

BW No, um, when I graduated high school, I took a two month trip and traveled all around Europe, and, I, as a kid growing up back in the back house my mom and dad were always promoting different people from different cultures.

We had some, I remember we had some exchange students, teachers, from Nigeria or someplace and they stayed with us for a

week, and this was several different times we had people from different countries in different parts of the world stay with us so, I was always drawn to new people and different things. I don't really know how to answer that question...

DD But today you say it's gotten to some 35-40% of the business...

BW You know, I'd have to qualify that, I'd have to talk to Sue...

DD Sure, I understand that. That's a good guess, and that seems to be about what other classic 66 spots do...a good chunk of their business, let's just say that, is people who come, who've never hears of Springfield, IL.

BW Right...

DD Now, you say you've gotten to know some of these people, they've become friends. Do you ever ask them why they care about Route 66? What do they say? Why are they there?

BW I don't think I've asked that question. I can only approach it from the perspective of, I was always intrigued as a kid with the Wild West, like Bob was. I was more interested in guns and shooting and killing Indians, than Bob was. Bob was more collecting the snakes and taking care of them.

And what's interesting, is if it's someplace that you've read about, and you've heard about, but you haven't been there, it becomes bigger to you. Then you set as a goal to learn more about it and to go there. And when you go there, it may not be as big as you thought it was. And I think people with Route 66 have heard so much about it.

There's been so many books, so many videos, so many interesting characters portrayed on different TV programs: local, as well as more nationally broadcast. They want to experience that too. They see there's a part of history, some excitement there, and they want to experience that too. So that's why they come. I think.

DD That's a good guess...at some point, though, your dad is getting interested in working with Tom, I imagine he joins the Route 66 Association of Illinois?

BW You know, we did, I think mom and dad did. Dad was always charitable with organizations, and things like that. I guess Cozy

Dog's a life member now. I don't know how that works, I was never...

DD *How about you? When you and Sue were running the restaurant, were you members?*

BW Oh yeah, we were members. We joined a few times, and of course, I join an organization I don't usually stay with it. I probably joined the NRA dozens of times in my life but I don't stay with it, I wait till they have a really good deal and I can get a free hat or something.

But, we looked forward to the Route 66 events. It was money for us and I certainly enjoyed the attention. I was comfortable talking to strange people, not strange people – different people, people I hadn't met before. And, I don't think Sue was at first but I think she's developed that now. I think she's very good at that.

DD Your brother Bob's own involvement with Route 66 must have taken you further into the world of Route 66...

BW No, I don't think so. I'm only speaking just for me. Bob's involvement in Route 66 was awe-inspiring to me. The way he worked and the extended family that grew around him. But I was so busy working, and doing my own thing, I've got six children, spending time with them or thinking about them.

When I left the restaurant business in 2001, I went back to school and pursued another course of study. So I was going to school full time and working. And trying to keep up with whatever else was going on, and I've always been, since I've left the restaurant I've been in a constant state of one crisis to the next. I think that's good, because it hadn't been that way, I would have pulled more hair out than I'm losing anyway.

But I don't think Bob's involvement with Route 66 really drew me to the highway, because it wasn't me.

DD Let's talk a little bit about Bob, was he older than you?

BW Yes, he was born in April of 1945. And I was born in August of 1947, so he's a year and a half...

DD *When did he start noticing, or when did people start noticing that he had a talent with drawing?*

BW

Well Bob had a talent for drawing from as far back as I can remember. His older brother Bill, he's 68 now, 69, and he spent his life as a cartographer for the state of Illinois, but Bill is an artist as well.

I can remember as a kid looking through Bill's desk drawer, looking for his notebooks and paper, trying to find pictures of scantily clad women that he had drawn because he was so good. Bob I think inherited that ability. Grandma Waldmire was a musician and an artist. My dad was a musician, his two brothers were both musicians, and extremely creative people.

I'm the one kid that didn't get anything, I couldn't march a common step. Bob has always been drawing. He got his start drawing in 1970, when he realized that that's what he wanted to do and make a living doing.

When he was going to school in Carbondale, Southern Illinois, in Carbondale. And he met somebody who had done a poster of the city of Carbondale. Bob thought that was just the coolest thing in the world, so he did one of Springfield. Had it printed in '70, maybe three or four of them left, that's all that's left of them. And from there, that was kind of a commercial success, and Mom and Dad supported him, and my Dad just spent a lot of time contacting businesses, "would you like to sell my son's poster?" and my dad would drive around.

Back in 1946, when my Dad introduced Cozy Dogs at the Illinois State Fair, and opened up a Cozy Dog house here in Springfield, I had said that he was building concession stands, and that's true, but what he also did, was he loaded up his panel truck and he drove around Southern Illinois, Missouri, and Tennessee, and Indiana, and Ohio, and Arkansas, and he physically drove to all these places, like a sales trip, and he would carry with him a bag of Cozy Dog flour, and he would carry a little bitty fryer, and sticks and promotional materials, and he's stop at a lot of Mom and Pop places.

Back in the early 60's he still had 25 or 30 people that were selling Cozy Dogs that would every now and then call him up and say, "we need a bag of flour." I can remember driving a bag of Cozy Dog mix, I'd take it to the bus station and put an address on it and send it to these people so they could make Cozy Dogs.

So there were a lot of mom and pop places that sold Cozy Dogs too, and he'd give them the signage and stuff, and sell it to them on

contract. He was also that kind of promoter, and, so, he did the same thing with Bob and Bob's artwork. Every time Bob would go create something, my Dad would think it was marvelous and go out of his way to this up the contacts.

The Holiday Inn, which is not a Holiday Inn anymore, but they had a gift shop there, and it was my dad who put some of my brother's artwork in that gift shop. We can sell you so many at such n such, your profit ratio is this, you can make money, it doesn't cost you, you can get your money back...

So, in 1970 was when Bob got his first taste of artistic success, in terms of making some money at it. He didn't make much, no disrespect Bob and I'm sorry, and you won't agree with me, but he didn't know how to handle money. It was an unnecessary inconvenience. Bob just really wanted to draw and share his work.

I know that we made several hundred dollars at the festival this past September, selling Bob's posters and artwork and stuff. If Bob would have been down there, he would have maybe made a hundred dollars. He'd a got rid of the same amount of stuff, but the thing with Bob, and I always told people that, you know, if you go over and talk to my brother and you visit long enough, you become his friend and he won't charge you, he'll give it to you free. That's what he would do. I don't think people ever intentionally, he had people who wanted to pay him money and he wouldn't take it.

DD

This was my experience with Bob...

BW

You know a funny story about Bob after he bought his store in Hackberry, AZ, which was on the highway...you know Bob's schedule, he would be depressed and then he would be up, today they would call that bipolar, they used to call it manic depressive, and I think he's been that way his whole life. Some people they never know they are that, but that's the way they live their lives.

One time he didn't want any customers, so about 8:30, 9 o'clock one morning he looked our the window and he saw a whole bunch of people pulling in, visitors. He wasn't ready for visitors, he'd been up all night, he used to talk about his all-nighters all the time, how he'd do all-nighters. So he locked the door, and pulled the shade and went into the backroom and played his flute, and about 30 minutes later or so he'd get up and go out there, and sure enough they were gone.

He'd unlock his door and he'd go outside, and he did that, and it was a bunch of money stuck in the door, with a note written by these visitors from Germany, how they loved his place, and they were sorry they'd missed him, and they hoped someday they could see him again. And he was so guilt ridden, that he took all that money and he went in and he created and built a bonfire, and he burned all that money. Because he knew he wouldn't be able to find them to return the money to them. So he wanted to return it spiritually, because he wouldn't feel right to use that money for anything else. And that was Bob.

*DD* *Let me take you back to his early days, and then I want to visit that Hackberry Ranch. Now he had a job as a draftsman he once told me?*

*BW* You know, I read that, I don't remember that. I remember he worked as a night auditor or a night clerk at a hotel one time for a few months. I don't ever remember him having a job as a draftsman. Well, when he was saying that, he was saying that's where he learned to use his pictograph, fine line careful strokes.

That's probably a genuine memory and not something that had been altered. It was just a part of his life I didn't know about.

*DD* *When did you notice that he'd become an accomplished artist?*

*BW* When I was in high school. I mean, I knew he was an artist then. Bob was always a leader, as well as a follower, but a leader too, and daring, and fun-loving, and he created, he and some of his Rochester friends who are still around and miss him greatly, created what they called the Purple Gougers club in high school. Today, it'd probably be called a gang, but it was the Purple Gougers!

And he designed the art logo, they had their tee-shirts printed, and they had their motto was with a finger up the nose, cartoon character, "Pick your nose for a quarter!" That was the motto of the Purple Gougers, gimme a quarter, I'll pick your nose. They were the Purple Gougers, and they did some goofy things, they drug a dead cow around Rochester once.

So, I knew way back when that he was very talented. I mean Mom and Dad did. He won third place in a contest of some sort, I don't know anything about this, other than he gave it to Mother and she glued it to this piece of pine and sprayed it and shellacked over it

and put various coats of varnish on it, and this is called decoupage, as an art form. But that's one of the first drawings I've seen of his.

*DD* *So he's drawing all through high school...*

*BW* Oh yeah, always...just instinctually he had to.

*DD* *When did he start getting recognition, you mention this 1955, 66 gallery of creativity, did you notice what was the next step up from this?*

*BW* The next step up was his poster that he did in 1970, and I can show it to you. And from then it was just full speed ahead. Never stopped.

*DD* *Do you know why he was so engaged by Route 66?*

*BW* Yes. Bob didn't become engaged in Route 66 until the early part of the '90's, before he ever got into that, he'd go to one college town for the college poster, the calendar poster and stuff.

I hope I have my facts straight, but Route 66...he saw Route 66 as a way to travel, to go out west, and he loved meeting new people, and to make money while he was doing it, and it kind of became a circular thing, where the more he spent time on Route 66, the more he identified with restoring it to its natural state, and preserving it.

Bob was a packrat, as I am, and my dad was, my dad as a packrat solved his compulsion by just building a new barn. Every so many years, he'd build a new building and put it in there.

I think it didn't start out as, you used the term obsession, it didn't start out that way, but it became that, and it lasted long enough for Bob to explore almost all of Route 66, and by the time he had passed on, well even before that he was done with Route 66, he "de-66'd" his van, so that people wouldn't look at his van and think, oh that's Bob Waldmire's Route 66 van. He used to have this big sign on it, "The Mobile Information Center," he took that off, he took all the 66 stuff off of his van. And he was onto other things.

*DD* *Can I ask why that happened? Why did he "de-66"?*

*BW* I think from what Bob has told me and what some of his friends have told me, some of the things he's told them, he was tired of not having any time to himself. That's a conflicted statement. He had a



lot of time to himself, but when he wanted to be alone, and somebody wanted to talk to him, and he wanted to be alone, he was tired of repeating the same shtick all the time.

He would stop someplace and he'd be doing some work, he'd stop at a restaurant and he's gonna draw their dining room and trade it for a salad bar, or for an evening. And then, he would be doing his work and somebody would see his van, they'd come in and want to talk to him, and he'd spend three hours telling the same story.

Similar stories, that he'd already repeated, because these people would somehow ask the same questions: how'd you get started? Why'd you get started? What have you done? And I think he got really fatigued from repeating himself. So I think that's why he did that.

But, tied in with that, he wasn't trying to run away from Route 66, he was just expanded, he had done just about all the postcards he could do along the highway, and now he was interested in Highway 666, and he was interested in Highway US-80, and highway US-1.

I remember him telling me he wanted to do US-1, and he wanted to do the California highway that runs along the coastline. He had so many things he wanted to do, he wanted to finish the whole series of countries, nations of the world. I think he's only got three of those finished. Japan and Sweden...

DD

*Maybe it was just that he felt he was being limited?*

BW

No...

DD

*Or there was too much about 66?*

BW

No, I think he explored, he satisfied his drive to preserve Route 66. He did a lot for it. He didn't want to shy away from any 66 activities, but he did want to have time to pursue other things too. I'm certain he'll probably be best remembered as a Route 66, or an artist traveling the highway, because that's...he still talked about his magnum opus.

It took him four years to create a ten page map of Route 66. That's a marvelous, I don't want to say it's underappreciated, and I think the appreciation will grow as the years pass, but to sell a map like that for ten dollars...and he used to sell it for four, is like – in

dollars and cents I'm thinking – Bob, you know where's Colonel Parker when you need him?

That's what Bob needed. Bob needed for Colonel Parker to come along, put his arm around him, and say, "let me show you how to do this right, let me show you how to be appreciated and wanted, and still do what you want to do." And I'm no Colonel Parker.

DD

*It sounds like your dad had some of that quality.*

BW

Yeah, a funny story involving money, he had a postcard rack at the restaurant and selling his stickers and postcards, and he's sell them to me for whatever, and I'd sell them for a quarter and stuff. I looked at all the other things out, and I said, you know, these things outta be fifty cents a piece, there's marvelous work. And so, I marked them all up and I started selling these postcards for fifty cents a piece.

He came in one time, one Spring, when he was coming back from one of his trips, and he said, "why are you selling those for fifty cents a piece?" And I said, well, because I can, and that's what people are willing to pay, because I have other postcards on the rack, not just his, and I'm selling them for fifty cents a piece. He said, you can't do that, if you sell them for fifty cents a piece, it means I have to charge you more for them, I'm going to have to charge you another quarter for them. I said, no, no I bought them from you, and now they're mine to sell them for what I want. He says, you can't do that, that's not right. So he went over and he re-priced all the postcards back to a quarter. Then he'd leave and I'd mark them up again.

DD

*The story about Hackberry, he set up this visitor's center, I never did get to visit him at Hackberry, he was done with it by the time I got to know him. He said he used a portion of the farm, of funds from the farm that his dad bought him...? Can you give me some background on that?*

BW

Well, my dad was very sick at this time, we're going back to 1990, and Bob had always been looking to settle down. But, there was something about him that couldn't settle down. Every time he tried, he wasn't happy. My dad bought some property at the end of the road here, it was an old green cabin there. So my dad bought it and gave it to him, and Bob was happy. That's it, that's all I want Dad, this is it. And, a few years later, he didn't want it anymore, and he sold it.

So, that didn't work out for Bob, and he didn't really know what he wanted, and about this time he's infatuated with Route 66, and he's deeply involved with Route 66. Said, I want to live on Route 66, I grew up on Route 66, the cozy dog is on Route 66. And he found this place out there, and he says Dad, this is it. This is what I want now, I know what I want and this is what it is.

And, my dad was very sick. Bob would always go to Mom and Dad and say...Daddy was the money bags. Not that he had millions of dollars, but he made things happen.

He had the farm paid off, and didn't have much money coming in, the social security, and Mom's social security, and didn't really owe anybody anything, and so, Dad says buy it. He says, well how do I get the money, he says well, we'll mortgage the farm. So, Mom and Dad mortgaged the farm and gave him a check for \$50,000, and that was the end of his inheritance, he will get no more from the farm. That's fine, that's fine.

So he took the \$50,000 and went out to Arizona, and bought the Hackberry store, 20 acres, 25 acres, I don't know. And it was just a very old gas station, general store. There was a house on the property and a small building, kind of right on the highway, directly on Route 66, and it kind of went up. So he bought it, and we all went out there to visit it, and look at it, and we did.

He made all kinds of improvements, he made solar collectors, he decorated the place, he did some murals inside the building, relatively fixed up the utilities he needed and stuff, he did have electricity, and had the visitor's center. People would stop and see him and he loved it. He'd bring them in and feed them some tea or fritters, did he ever make you fritters? So, that's how the Hackberry store came about.

*DD*

*Now, after a few years he sold that? What happened?*

*BW*

He did, he got tired of the routine, he got tired of the man that owned the property next to him, harvesting boulders. He didn't like that. The guy was digging up boulders out of the ground and selling them. And he thought that was no good, and the machinery bothered him, if the guy was driving a bulldozer or a tractor he could feel it, you could feel that. He didn't like that. He got into some conflicts. There are some news articles concerning his dispute over the moving of the boulders, and selling them and stuff.

Bob reached a point where, "I'm done here, I want to sell it, I found this place down in Portales, AZ, and I think I can get it, and that's what I want to do." So he sold the Hackberry place to John and Kerry Pritchard, who himself, Mr. Pritchard, I met him and talked to him this past summer, seems like an OK guy, has turned the store into, I don't want to say a tourist trap, but certainly very tourist-y, and they just sell stuff to travelers who want to buy a postcard or a thimble or whatever it is, a spoon, whatever.

DD

*Do they still sell Bob's drawings?*

BW

They don't sell, and they didn't sell any of Bob's...they did for awhile and the last time Bob was in there to see them, and talk to John, Bob left and says, "I'll never set foot in this store again," and he says "he'll never have any of my artwork in this store again!" And Bob left, he didn't like what it had become.

Now Mr. Pritchard has demonstrated some interest in maybe selling some of the postcards, but there's nothing of Bob's in there except for maybe the stuff he left on the walls, painted, and that's too bad. Bob was very selective in his friends.

In Winslow, Darlene's store is here, Darlene Witter...across the street is another store...Bob wouldn't go in that store, he didn't like the way they did business. So he would only sell Darlene's stuff, and the Pasada down the street. And once he established a place that would sell his work, he would give them the exclusive and wouldn't sell it to anybody else. Let them be the only ones to handle it.

DD

*He seems likes a principled man...*

BW

He was very principled, absolutely. And he tried to live by those principles most of the time. Sometimes they conflicted with the human part of him, and then he had to rationalize how he could, you shouldn't ever kill anything but if it's a house sparrow you can kill it because it didn't originate in this country. Well, how do we know, really...maybe it did, and then it left, and came back.

He would catch mice, and if it was a house mouse, he'd kill it. But, if it was a field mouse, or a white footed mouse, he'd turn it loose. He would probably swat a mosquito or kill a fly if it was in his immediate vicinity if it was inside a location, but if he was outside, he's let them take their fill and go about their business, which was nice. So he sold it, and bought the place in Portales, AZ, and turned that into his homestead.

DD *Now, Bob mentions in my interview that he was writing a book about your dad...*

BW Yes.

DD *Do you have that manuscript?*

BW Yes.

DD *How complete is it?*

BW Well, it's not. He started on it and I think he spent, he probably spent a year or so working at it, many more years talking about it. He did complete the mini-book, did you ever see the mini-book? I can show you the mini book of Mom and Dad, the history and everything.

It's just barely in the paste up outline form. There's very little text, very little text. It continued to be an evolving thing, and Bob did not know how to put it together, much like I don't know how to catalogue his work upstairs.

It became such an overwhelming thing to him, that he didn't know how to start, that he would get dressed, and then he'd find something else he could do. Much like, if I'm trying to clean up my dining room table, which is now my office, even though I have an office upstairs, I've got all that mess, so I'll go over there and I'll want to clean it, and I'll think, I don't know what to do with this, I don't know what to do with this...my tractor's sitting outside, Ill go get on the tractor and I'll go get on the tractor and I'll mow grass. So I'll go mow grass for three hours and I'll feel a lot better.

And, that's what Bob would do. He would then do a project that he knew how to do, that he knew he could get done, or at least knew how to start it, and then he would not do anything more with that.

DD *The final question I have is, Bob Waldmire is the best known artist on Route 66. I'm sure there are other famous artists who have lived on or near Route 66, there are lots of different ways to define that, but in terms of someone who created artwork about Route 66, Waldmire is the guy. I think that to some extent he paid a price for that, a price for being an itinerant artist.*

BW

Route 66 was good for Bob, and Bob was good for Route 66. The price he paid did not have...if it wasn't Route 66, it would have been something else. So Route 66 really, really saved him, and gave him the most direction he's had his entire life.

So, I wouldn't say Bob paid a price for being the Route 66 artist. They had a very close, symbiotic relationship. Just like the baby bird loves its mother, and mom wants it out of the nest, Bob loved Route 66, and it was clinging to him, and he was wanting to get away, but he didn't know what he was gonna get away to, and so he would have come back to Route 66.

But one of Bob's greatest fears, or dislikes, was the idea of commercialization. Bob did not like commercialization. And he saw a lot of Route 66 becoming commercialized. He saw a lot of the associations, I don't know whether you see this or not, the association doesn't get along with you...the Missouri Association, they have different goals and objectives...he didn't like that part of it.

He mellowed as he got older, and then of course, I think Bob's personality and motivations went through different stages, and it's unfortunate that at this last stage, where he was so mellow and accepting and willing to accept change and willing to accept a different way of looking at things, happened the same time that his body was giving out, so that seems like an unwritten chapter in his life, that I think could have been really, really fulfilling for him, if he hadn't been so sick.

DD

*I find myself wondering whether his taste for non-commercialism, his taste for nature, his taste for a principled and maybe simpler, older life, that if these things didn't coalesce into his Route 66 work, and in turn influence how Route 66 was revived?*

BW

That's paradoxical. I guess it's best illustrated, or maybe make a comparison to Bob's involvement with the Hackberry general store, that he bought it as a visitor's center, he turned it into a successful visitor's center, and once he did that, in order to maintain it, it had to become commercialized, and he hated that.

That was very difficult for Bob to adjust to, it was kind of like...you look in his bus or his van, his living accommodations, he had a coffee cup, he did have several because people gave it to him, but he would use one cup, that's it. Then he'd wash it and use it again, over and over. You know, always recycling everything.

It made him very sad, and angry, at the wastefulness of humans. Who seemed to consume without any thought to the future consequences. He appreciated people who...he didn't mind people eating meat, he didn't mind people who hunted, had killed, like the Indians would hunt and kill, they didn't waste anything. It was part of an existence relationship. It's true he was a vegan, but part of that was driven by a belief that it's good for you, and that eating meat is bad, because the Peace Pilgrim was a vegetarian and he adored her...

DD

*I just wanted to see in talking to you a kind of parallel between his aesthetic and maybe how he influenced how we understand Route 66. Certainly, his bio-regionalism has helped people understand Route 66 in a different way, and I've talked with him at length about that, but I'm thinking to some extent his personal preferences, personal aesthetic, personal principles, affected how we understand Route 66...*

BW

I'm not sure I know how to answer that...because I don't know who the "we" is. Who is the "we" that understands Route 66? Is that the people that want to preserve it, or the people that are trying to make money on it? Or the people that are there just because it's a good ride right now?

I saw a lot of visitors and tourists driving Route 66 when I was out there with my son, this summer, and driving back they would drive the highway, and they're not driving slow, they're driving 65, 70 miles an hour, and they're going from destination to destination to destination.

And when Bob would travel the highway, he would look at the sagebrush, he would look at the cactus plants, he would look at the rocks, he would look at the nature abounds, he would notice the blooms on the cactus, or he'd notice the birds, and he'd count how many different animal species he would find and see, and he would draw pictures of them sometimes.

Bob's way of traveling and enjoying nature, I think is really foreign to most people who get on the highway to drive it. I think most people, regardless of their well intentioned rhetoric, are there for either public recognition, to have their chance at the limelight or make money. I don't mean to be pessimistic, but that's what I see.

DD

*But not Bob Waldmire...*

BW

No sir, he was not there to make money, he was there to save it. And I too am not there to save it, but I've got a Styrofoam cup in there that I've been using for coffee for two, three weeks. That's fine with me. Everybody else thinks I'm nuts. But really, I don't know...

DD

*Thanks you very much, Buz. I want to make sure that I have your permission to transcribe this interview, and deposit it in an archive at some point, and to use it in my writing and broadcasting...*

BW

Yes, you have my verbal permission, and I can do it in writing if you want, to use any and all of this interview for any purposes you deem necessary.