A Veterans Oral History

Heritage Education Commission
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Moorhead, MN

Ben Steele
Narrator

Linda Jenson
Interviewer

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Ben Steele Biography
Benjamin Steele was born in Roundup, MT and graduated from Billings Senior High School in 1939. He enlisted in the Air Force/Army Air Corps in 1940 and some of his military duties and training included Base Operations, Control Tower and Flight Plans. Benjamin was involved in Pearl Harbor and belonged to a squadron where all their planes were destroyed in the first day of the war. After separation from military duty in 1946 Benjamin attended Kent State University – 1951, Denver University – 1953, and Cleveland Institute of Art – 1956. Some of his occupation included Civil Service – Dept. of the Army, College Professor and Artist.

Decorations:
- Purple Heart
- POW Medal
- Bronze Star
- 3 Presidential Citations
- Pearl Harbor Philippine Defense
- Good Conduct

BS: My name, Ben C. Steele, 2425 Cascade, Billings, Montana 59102.

LJ: Mr. Steele, where you born?

BS: Roundup, Montana.

LJ: How big a town?

BS: Oh, it's about 2,000.

LJ: And who were your parents?

BS: My parents was Elizabeth G. McCleary, was my mother's maiden name, and Benjamin C. Steele, Sr.

LJ: And what did they do for a living?

BS: We ranched south of Musselshell, which is about 26 miles east of Roundup. We had a cattle ranch.

LJ: Where did you go to high school?

BS: I went to high school in Billings Senior High School … Montana.

LJ: And did you graduate from there?

BS: Yes.

LJ: Did you go right on to college?

BS: No.

LJ: Were you drafted?

BS: No, I went out and worked on ranches until I joined the military.

LJ: So you joined, you weren't drafted.

BS: No, I joined before the conscription in 1940. I joined October 10, 1940.

LJ: And where did you go for your training?

BS: I went to March Field, California -- and I joined the Army Air Corps.

LJ: How long were you in training?

BS: I was there oh, about a year. Then I went from there to Albuquerque, New Mexico, where I was assigned to the 19th Bomb Group, which were the B-17 outfit.

LJ: Where did you go from New Mexico?

BS: I went from Albuquerque to the Philippines in October of 1941.

LJ: What did you do in the Philippines once you got there?

BS: Before the war I was operations control tower and flight plans for airplanes. And I was training to be gunner at the time the war started out because there wasn't room for me in operations over at the Clark Field.

LJ: Any special memories of your time in the Philippines?

BS: Oh, I wasn't there long enough to know much about the Philippines. I got into Manila once before the war started because it was just six weeks prior to Pearl Harbor.

LJ: And where did you go from there?

BS: From Clark Field, we went into Bataan. That's because the war started on December the 8th over there. You know, it was a day later in the Philippines because we were on the other side of the line. We stayed at Clark Field until we were bombed the same day as Pearl Harbor. And we stayed at Clark Field until Christmas Day of 1941. When the Japanese invaded the Philippines, then we were forced into Bataan. We didn't have any airplanes left because we lost them all the first day of the war. So they put us all in the infantry. And I fought on Bataan during the entire campaign of Bataan on the front lines.

LJ: How long a time was that?

BS: It was only a matter of a month or so. And we fought on the front lines until April the 9th of 1942 … when Bataan fell and we were captured.

LJ: What happened then, where did they take you?

BS: I was captured by tanks and there was only about 10 of us in the group. I was captured on an ammunition trail leading down into southern tip of Bataan. About 10 tanks rolled in on us; we walked out in front of them, certainly expecting to be shot. But they turned us over to the troops, which were in back of the tanks. They loaded their packs on us and we had to carry their packs for about five miles -- where we went to the main concentration of prisoners of war, which was southern tip of Bataan.

And from there, we started the so called "Death March of Bataan." And there were about 70,000 Filipinos and 10,000 Americans. They had no provisions for us for water or food or anything or transportation. And we started the march on the morning of April the 10th and I was on it about a week. We hadn't eaten since the night of the 6th and so I went about eight or nine days without anything at all to speak of. Two canteen cups of rice all the time we were on the march. And that's all the food we got. But we didn't get enough water. They fought us off the water and so a lot of men died from thirst. And a lot of them died with -- they had bullet wounds, some of the fellows from the battle. And a lot of them their feet got sore and they took their shoes off and walked on the gravel road with blistered feet; and of course, they didn't make it. And they had clean-up squads coming behind the columns.

There were about 500 of us in a group; and if you fell out, you were killed, either bayoneted or shot. And I was jabbed with a bayonet but not too severely, probably an inch or so. I was trying to help a fellow and the Jap guard came along and made me quit by jabbing me with the bayonet. And I lost a little blood but not a lot. But I can remember how the flies used to follow me because I had blood on my shirt and -- it was sore. But I healed up and got all right.

We went to a little town called San Fernando after about 65 miles. And there they loaded us into boxcars and took us another 50 miles into Capas, Tarlac Province. And we were loaded in the boxcars … we were put about 100 to a car and jammed in there just as many as could stand up. We couldn't sit down, we were just standing up in the car. But they were metal cars and the heat on the cars made them just like a furnace and a lot of the men suffocated in the cars and everything. We tried to get our nose in a crack where we'd get fresh air but there weren't that many cracks available.

Went to this Capas, Tarlac and we were unloaded there, and some of the men died in the cars because we were such a weakened condition after Bataan because we were starving on Bataan. We didn't have any food coming in from the outside and we didn't have enough stored. And we walked about another eight miles on into the first prison camp, which was Camp O'Donnell. And there the Filipinos, there were about 70,000 Filipinos and 10,000 Americans, and they claim 10,000 died on the march; that's Filipinos and Americans.

The Filipinos were on one side of the fence and we were on the other, and the death rate of the Filipinos was 500 a day or so. They carried them out and they just piled them up out in the field. They couldn't bury them fast enough. And the Americans, there were about 60 or 70 a day or more. I worked on the burial details. We'd dig big holes and buried these mass graves. And sometimes during the night, the wild dogs would dig up the bodies and scatter them all over the place; we'd come back the next morning and pick up the pieces and put them in the hole and then bury the men that died. But a lot of times we wouldn't get to them for three or four days and then the hot sun, and everything, it was a mess. And things were so bad there that, they had a detail going out and people could volunteer for it. So I volunteered for it and there were about 325 of us, we went to a work detail in the southern tip of Luzon Island in the jungle area building roads through the jungle. And we marched another 25 miles into this road and we carried -- actually carried six men with malaria in there to work on the road. And a couple of them died on the way in. But we were supposed to be going in there to go to work.

As the rainy season was starting and we were in the rain and we slept in the mud and we worked 12-hour shifts on the road and anybody that stood up had to go to work. The guards would come through the camp area, which was just an old riverbed, and anybody who could stand up, why they'd make you go out to work. And a lot of men died right at the end of a pick and a shovel. I got very sick on the road and finally got where I couldn't even go out to work and they broke up the detail after about three months. And they took us into Bilibid Prison in Manila. If I hadn't have gone there when I did, if a week later I'd have been a dead man. But Bilibid Prison saved my life.

Right after the war started they captured Cavite Naval Yard, which was the home of the Asiatic Fleet. And there were a lot of Army doctors, Navy doctors, and corpsmen, and they went as a unit into Bilibid and they tried to help people that were coming in from work details and everything at Bilibid. It was kind of -- we called it a hospital, if you want to call it that. It was a place to come in and die, too. Anyway, you had to be very sick to get any medicine, and I was sick enough to get some, and I got over my malaria.

I was getting very, very awfully bad, which is -- when you starve to death that's what you do. The first thing you do is start to swell and you can't pass water and all the water goes into your tissues and your system. My legs were swelling up and it had got up into my body and in Christmas of 1942 we got a Red Cross parcel, I remember.

It was made by the American Red Cross and it had a can of Spam and corned beef and some chocolate bars and coffee and prem [?] -- and some other cans. There was a can of butter and everything. And I took that and I rationed it to myself, just a little bit at a time. And I got rid of my beriberi, because the minute -- our body was so starved for vitamins and anytime you ate something with protein in it why it would activate and I finally lost all the water in my system. You'd go for a week or so without passing water at all. And it would all go into your system. So when I finally went down I was just skinny as a crow. There was all nothing left but bone because it takes all the flesh with it when it finally goes out of your system.

Anyway, I lived through it and I was about six months in there that I didn't walk in Bilibid Prison. And that's when I started drawing. And I -- to pass the time of day and I drew on the floor or anything and I took charcoal out of the wood fires and worked with that. Finally got some pencils and some paper and -- and -- they brought in to start the rice fires.

There were some big sheets of paper. I got some and started drawing on the backs of them and I completed about 50 drawings.

LJ: Did you have to hide it from the guards?

BS: And I gave them to a Catholic priest and he put them in the bottom of his mass kit. He had a little false compartment in there that he kept some of his stuff. He was kind of keeping a diary anyway and he kept my drawings in there. Well I didn't have anything of an atrocity nature to speak of. They were just normal chow lines and that sort of thing and prisoners standing around the beds and in the building. And I completed about 50 drawings. Yes, which I later lost.

After Bilibid, I stayed in there a year and a half but that was the best place I was in. I hated to leave the place because I knew it was about the best place to be. So after about a year and half, which was early 1944, I went to Cabanatuan, which was a camp north of Manila about 60 miles. And there is

a recent book out on it, called Ghost Soldiers by Hampton Sides, that just came out and it's liberation of Cabanatuan Prison Camp and one of the most courageous missions in World War II. The Rangers went in and liberated it.

Anyway, I stayed in Cabanatuan about six months. And at that time, the Americans were starting to come up and they were coming into the Philippines. They were taking New Guinea and Tarawa, Tinian Island, and Saipan and all of those places. They were coming into the Philippines and the Japanese were taking prisoners of war to Japan. So they were loading ships out of Manila Bay and taking us to Japan.

And I sailed out of Manila Bay on the Fourth of July of 1944. We were two months aboard this so-called "hell ships," we used to call them. And they were just that because they put us down in the holds of the ship and covered the hatches. We were down in the holds of the ship for two months. We didn't wash our face and hands for two months ... we were filthy dirty. And if we got any water, we drank the water. They'd lower buckets down in there for latrines and for rice and sometimes you were lucky to get some of the rice because when it was lowered down into the hold the guys were all hungry and they'd just kind of take what they wanted. Sometimes it wouldn't get to guys on the outer perimeter at all. So we went hungry in there. We were glad to get off that ship after two months and we landed in Moji, Japan.

When we first landed, we went out into Manila Bay and anchored for two weeks. And a typhoon came in and we sailed during the typhoon. It probably saved our lives because the Americans were blockading the Philippines with submarines and they had aircraft flying over the place at the time and sinking ships. They sunk some of the "hell ships" coming out of there, several of them.

One of them my drawings with the priest was on this, what they call the Oryoku Maru, and my drawings went down with the ship. Anyway he made it back to the States, but he got on another ship and they sunk the second one, but he finally got to Japan and he was one of 160 out of 1,600 that survived the sinking of those ships. So we call them "hell ships" and that's just what they were. Because they were unmarked freighters and the Americans thought there was just freight coming out of the Philippines, so they were sinking them.

Anyway, when we got to Japan in September of 1944, they divided the group and we went to separate coal mines. I went to what they call Omine Machi, Japan, and they put us to work in coal mines. When we got to the camp, why the camp had British prisoners of war captured at Singapore and we were in with them … so half of the camp was British.

We started working this old mine they reactivated it just for prisoners of war because it was really an old mine. From the entrance to the mine to the coal face, one of the places was three miles deep. So you'd go down in cable cars and get off on different levels and walk through rock tunnels and go to the coal face and we'd do that every day. We'd work 12-hour shifts. We'd go 10 days and then they'd get a day off and during our day off we'd clean up the camp and wash our clothes if we could, and then we'd go 10 nights. So we'd alter it. By the time you'd get used to daytime, why then they'd put you on nights. I remember we'd get up in the morning to go to work and we'd have roll call at five o'clock and everybody was there, you know. If they told you to be there at five o'clock you were there. There were no problems with people sleeping in or anything. Because when they called the roll off you'd better be there.

LJ: What would happen if you slept in?

BS: Well they'd go into your room and you'd be a bloody mess. So you'd get beat up if you didn't. So everybody was there. On very few occasions where fellows didn't answer roll call. So I always said I learned a great deal about punctuality in there -- putting it mildly. So to this day, I'm always early, usually, for any appointment.

LJ: Makes sense.

BS: That's right. It kind of stayed with me. I was always the first one to school when I was teaching. And it's something that kind of stayed with me. So I learned a few things about work ethics and that sort of thing in there. The Japanese have terrific work ethics. Students do and everything else. Well I learned some of that in there. And it didn't hurt me at all that way. So we were there a year.

LJ: In the mines?

BS: Until the war ended. The mine boss came over and told us we wouldn't go to work that day. Of course that was great news, because we didn't like going down there anyway. And this happened for about three days this way, no work in the mine. So there's got to be something wrong, you know. We didn't know what it was, but thought it could be that war has ended and we didn't believe that and then be disappointed. So finally a B-29 came over and dropped us leaflets and told about the Japanese surrendering and then we believed it, so there was a big celebration then. And we were so happy to be free again.

They just opened the gates and all the guards left. We walked out into the villages and the Japanese people were afraid of us, you know. They'd all run when we'd come out of the gates and we gradually made friends with some of them though. They came over with planes and 29s and dropped us tons of

food ... K-rations and canned fruits and all that sort of thing and cigarettes and candy bars.

The first thing I got into was a box candy bars. I ate the whole box and got sick, of course. And got in some more bacon, I remember. And ate some of that and got sick again, but that was no problem. We were used to some of those things. We ate day and night for several days. We were so excited we couldn't sleep. We'd sleep and nap a little bit and then wake up and enjoy our freedom -- and eat some more. So that's the way the war ended.

We had to wait a month before the occupation troops came in. We finally got on a train and went out and met the troops because they had to set up processing stations. And we went to Wakayama, Japan, where they took all our clothes off, because we were all "lousy." Made us shower for 20 minutes, they timed us, with medicated soap and then they sprayed us as we came out. Then issued us new uniforms and fed us and put us on the most luxurious liner you ever saw, USS Constellation, hospital ship and it had white sheets. We just couldn't believe this place.

LJ: Heaven.

BS: And we were so excited. I remember getting on the sheets at night and I said, "Oh, I can't believe this." You know, had earphones, radios and all that sort of thing and movies on deck and food galore, and the next morning we went through the breakfast line and they had bacon and eggs. I went through about four times. Finally, I couldn't eat the last one I got, so I made a sandwich out of bacon and eggs and wrapped it up; and then I put it under my pillow. The doctor came around and he said, "What do you have under there?" "Oh, it's just part of my breakfast I couldn't eat, thought I'd have a lunch after a while." He said, "Don't worry. We're going to feed you on this ship. So you don't have to worry about food anymore." And I said, "Well, I don't take any chances, you know. When I get an advantage to get food I hoard it." He said, "You're getting grease all over the sheets." And he said, "We don't allow that in here. And you can't do that anymore."

They were getting a big charge out of that because we were a bunch of strange guys. We'd been living this way you know like a bunch of reptiles for three and a half years and you get kind of used to it after a while. You kind of adapt to most anything, you know, if you have to.

But anyway, we went to Okinawa, Japan, and from there they flew us back to the States. I was in the States into San Francisco before my folks even knew I was liberated. I called them up on the phone from San Francisco and they almost collapsed when they heard my voice. They'd been watching the list of POWs liberated every day and I wasn't on the list for more than a month and so they'd kind of given up on me because they hadn't heard from me for so long.

To start with, when Corregidor fell, why everybody was listed as "missing in action" and I was "missing in action" for about a year and a half. And then a list came out of prisoners of war and I was on that list.

We used to send little cards out once in a while, you know, that "I'm well, I'm not under treatment" and just things that the Japanese wanted to hear, and then we signed them and send them home. So Mother got four or five of those. When I went to Japan, I said, "Well, it's cooler here," so they knew I'd been moved. And that was about it.

I came back to the States and I find I was in the hospital for a year, being treated for a lot of different things, psychological problems and all that sort of thing for about a year. I wasn't a bed patient, I was an 'in and out.'

Then I went to school. I started the GI Bill and went to the Cleveland Institute of Art where I graduated in 1950. I went four years in three. I went summers and the whole time. Then I went to Kent State University for a year and got some academics and graduated there in 1952 -- '51. Then I went and started my master's degree at the University of Denver and I met Shirley in the meantime and I taught high school at her hometown. We were married and we went back and I finished my master's degree in 1953. So I went really six years in about four or five because I went summers. I didn't ever stop. I thought I was too old to be going to school. I was 28 years old when I started. I liked school, it was kind of a breeze after everything that I'd been through. And there were a lot of GIs at school at that time. There was a big flux of GI Bill students.

After I got through with my graduate degree, I got a job with the Department of Army. I went back and kind of worked with the military again, but I was civil service and I worked in Kansas and the Pentagon and Atlanta, Georgia, 3rd Army. I was a staff crafts director, which is special services in the military and it's a recreational program for soldiers. Politics were too much for me so I decided I wanted to go back and get into college teaching.

I went out to Montana and went up and saw the president of the Eastern Montana College, it was at that time. It's Montana State University Billings now; and they put me on in the art department. And I wound up chairman of the art department, I taught there for about 25 years. I didn't start at Eastern until I was about 40 years old because I'd done a lot of living before that. And I retired in 1986 after about 25 years and wound up a college professor, full professor -- emeritus.

LJ: Congratulations.

BS: Yes, and little did I know I'd ever be a teacher when I was a cowboy back in Montana. I surprised a lot of my family because I didn't graduate from high school until I was 21 years old, because I dropped out of high school during

Depression days to help support the family. And took a job for $30 a month, cowboying and sheepherding, you know sheep camp tender. I did that for about three years and then I went back and finished high school.

I didn't quit high school because I wanted to, I quit because it was kind of a necessity. There were five kids at home and Dad was making $48 a month and 15 of that went for rent. Can you imagine that – $15 for a month's rent? But that left us $33 a month to live on with five kids, that's a little tough. So I went out and I sent my money home. My 30 bucks a month was a big boost to their salary at that time. But you could do a lot with $50 a month back in 1940, '39, '37, right along there. That's about it.

LJ: Do you still keep in contact with some of the buddies you served with?

BS: Oh yes, we have two national organizations. We have the American Ex-Prisoners of War and we have the American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor, which is strictly Pacific prisoners of war and a lot of them were there yesterday. We meet nationally and we meet regionally so we go to at least two a year. We have a great camaraderie among us. We claim we understand each other … it's hard to give people the real impact of something like this. You almost have to live it to really know what it's like, because it's a different life.

The survival rate was not very good off Bataan. We had a 60% casualty there due to the Death March and everything. But people who survived that first year and half had a pretty good chance of getting out of there if they weren't sunk on one of the "hell ships" or died in the mines or something. So the first year and a half was the worst part of it. And after the Japanese started losing the war, they eased up on us a little bit. I don't know what would have happened if they'd have won. We would have had rice paddies up and down the Red River. And that wouldn't have been too good, you know.

AQ: It would have ended up a lot different.

BS: Yes, right.

LJ: Do you have any final thoughts about what you went through serving your country?

BS: Well I did it because I thought it was the right thing to do. If you want to remain free you got to fight once in a while, otherwise somebody has to do it for you. So I'm very patriotic.

LJ: Mr. Steele, how would you like to be remembered?

BS: Well as a man who left a lot of tracks in life maybe and helped others.

LJ: That's great. Thank you very much, Mr. Steele.

Audience Questions (AQ)

AQ: I guess what I'm really curious about is you said the one ship sunk with the priest and you lost quite a few of your drawings. How did you feel when you found out that news, I mean . . .

BS: When I heard it?

AQ: Yes, when you heard about it?

BS: Oh, I didn't think too much about that really? I didn't get out of there with anything outside of a couple sketches that's over in the exhibit. I was glad to get out of there with my hide. I really didn't expect him to get out with them so I wasn't too shocked. And I had the ability to do them again, so I tried to remember some of those things and then I just redid them from memory. All those things are from memory over there. And I've got a lot of memory. I've got lots of ideas if I had time to do them all.

AQ: Kind of continuing along that line then, I know a lot of artists almost have to have the object right there in front of them . . .

BS: Yes.

AQ: When they sketch it and you pull yours straight out of memory.

BS: Right out of my head.

AQ: And that's never been a problem for you?

BS: I've got kind of a photographic memory. I've drawn places where people say, "that's it," you know. I don't look at it. I remember it as it was.

AQ: So when you draw the scene of the Bataan Death March or something, is there a specific scene that you can pull straight out of your head or something . . .

BS: Oh, sure. I've got a lot of them. I didn't do them all and I didn't do some of the worst ones, but there was a lot of vicious things took place on that march. There were decapitations, there was everything, you know. I saw a lot of guys killed.

AQ: I was really amazed at the detail of your drawings in there -- I mean they're very lifelike. I was wondering is that kind of way for you to get it out of your system?

BS: Well it is, yes. They're kind of an emotional release for me. And I've had psychologists say it's one of the best things to happen to kind of rehabilitate yourself. So they've helped me a lot. And they've helped me to talk about it and everything. I didn't used to talk about it too much. I'd draw pictures but I didn't talk about it. And they've gotten me involved where I talk about it now.

AQ: So you can kind of think of it as even like a link to your past, to the whole event that you went no matter what happens, that is always going to be there.

BS: Yes right; I don't forget very much.

AQ: I know speaking from my generation, too, who have never gone through anything like that, it's very, you know, surreal to see all that stuff and have it captured because there's no way we can ever experience what you have went through.

BS: You can learn a lot going through that exhibit there of conditions. And those aren't some of the worst things.

AQ: Wow. How much did you draw before all this happened?

BS: No. I knew of Will James. You ever hear of Will James?

AQ: Yes, I have.

BS: Huh?

AQ: Yes, I have.

BS: The western author/writer, 'Smokey and the Cow Pony' [Smokey the Cowhorse] and 'All the Day's Riding' [All in the Day's"] and the Lone Cowboy, all those. I knew him and I used to watch him draw. And that kind of inspired me to pass the time, you know. I think if he did it, and I probably can do that. But it always seems to sort of as something magical to me. That I didn't think I'd be able to do that. But anybody can do that really, to a certain level -- if you work at it. If you really get interested, you find a way to do it. It's like anything else, you know.

AQ: And then when you went off to school, did you take up studying art right away?

BS: Yeah,sI did. I knew I wanted to do that, so I went to a professional art school, which all they taught was art -- Cleveland Institute of Art. And I studied under some very famous people.

AQ: So your whole experience over there, kind of indirectly, set forth your path for the rest of your life?

BS: Oh yes. I found a profession in there. I'm the only one that did that I know of. There weren't too many to find in there, you know. Become an undertaker or something like that…

AQ: Do you think you would have started drawing if the march would have never happened, if you would have never had to go through all that?

BS: I seriously doubt it. I don't know. I probably would. I was very interested in art. I used to like to go through art exhibits and everything. I probably would have started sometime in life.

AQ: You said you remember a couple of other POW groups. How do the other POWs react to your drawings?

BS: Well, they like them. And I've heard some of them say they kind of make goose bumps stand out on their arms and stuff, but yes, they kind of

encourage me to do them … to document what we did. Because we don't have any other documentation -- like TV last night they had some of the Death March and those are in the archives but I don't know who took those. But the real nitty gritty of the camps is not documented. The Japanese took pictures but they destroyed them all -- otherwise they'd be in the archives.

AQ: You said that you shy away from the more gruesome-type scenes.

BS: I haven't done some of the more gory things, for some reason or another. I guess maybe I didn't want to think about it too much. But I may do some someday. I just recently finished one that's not in the exhibit; it's at home. But I should have sent it with the exhibit, I suppose. -- I don't sell too many of those -- for wall decorations…

AQ: Most would rather not . . .

BS: Julie (sp) and Rose Marie (sp) have got quite a gallery of them but they don't have any of those. I thought maybe they'd ask me for one of those someday but they don't seem to… It's something you don't want to look at every day.

AQ: Not something you want to hang over the fireplace . . .

BS: They're museum pieces, because not all art is beautiful, you know.

AQ: No, it's not.

BS: Yes, you get . . .

AQ: Do you get tired of drawing it?

BS: No, I don't think so. Not until I die anyway. It's something I kind of have to do. If I don't paint for a while, I get kind of frustrated. It's something that's in you that has to come out. I paint watercolors and everything now for pleasure and realistic landscapes. I've got a lot of them floating around. Cowboys. I love the watercolor.

LJ: It's a beautiful medium.

BS: It's a great medium.

AQ: Just from what I saw yesterday, the exhibit drew for an opening day, a lot of people especially during the middle of the day. How's it make you feel to see so many people enjoying your work?

BS: I enjoy that. I've had people say, "Why do you do these things? Why don't you do something beautiful?" I said, "I do. I'm not entirely gruesome."

AQ: Is there a particular piece in your collection that you're especially proud of or that evokes a powerful emotion from it?

BS: Not really, no, they're kind of all equal. Probably … I did the oils after I'd had training. I did the little pen and inks after I had training … the black and white pen and inks. So they're a little more skillful than the black and

whites. I didn't know anything but black and white when I did those. I didn't have any training when I did those. I enjoy painting and everything now because I understand color and mixtures and all that sort of thing. And I know a lot more than I did when I did the black and whites. They're kind of primitive.

AQ: I imagine you've seen your skill grow quite a bit, though, from when you first started drawing**.**

BS: Oh, yes. Oh, I can draw better than that now. I taught drawing for 25 years and I learned while I did that, you know. I learned from the students.

AQ: I've got a lot of respect for anybody who can draw, because I can't.

BS: Did you ever try?

AQ: I've tried a lot.

BS: You have to try hard. You can't just doodle around. You got to work at it hard, you know.

AQ: We're always drawing storyboards and things like that.

BS: You got to draw all day . . .

AQ: It's all stick people for me, that's the best I can do, they're good stick people, so …

BS: Yes, you have to work it hard and you have to learn perspective and all that, which is the science, you know.

AQ: Perspective comes into play for this, too.

BS: How to do three-dimensional color and all that sort of thing.

AQ: There's a lot to it.

BS: If you like drawing, keep at it and you'll get good.

AQ: To get skilled work?

BS: We hope. I've had students that say, "I want to draw like you do." I say, "Well, keep at it." After about 20 years maybe you can do that.

AQ: When you were teaching, did your students ask you a lot about your experience over there?

BS: Oh yes, the ones who knew about it. Oh yes.

AQ: I think we're good.

BS: Okay.