

I was invited (the unceremony), too, but it was too soon after I had had a heart attack. I didn't go.

(How did you meet Bert?) Through the store. He traded with us, I just don't know how long. It just seemed he was a fixture, you know what I mean? (How long has the store been there?) Since '29. (Then you got there before he did?) Yes. You see, Pat O'Hara was also down there in the dunes. He came back and hung himself in a tree down there. He was a newspaper reporter for Wm. Randolph Hearst. Then when Hearst died, he was working on the Los Angeles News or something like that, when they went in with Hearst, Hearst had blackballed Pat, so first thing we knew, we saw buzzards down there. We talked about it so the sheriff's went down there and Pat had hung himself. He'd been dead for three days. (You just got acquainted with Bert because he came in the store so often?) Yes. He'd come in early in the morning, you see, and visit. (Did he seem unusual to you? You must have known him as a relatively young man.) Yes. He always set up my horoscope for me and all. He set it up to '72, then he wouldn't go any farther. I'd ask him different things,

but he'd say I'd had enough. Then after that I had a heart
attack. That was interesting. (Was it accurate?) Pretty

much. Pretty much. (Did he ever talk to you about his child-
hood?) No. Never did. (What were the kinds of things he

liked to discuss when he came in to chat with you?) Well,

he didn't stay too long because he figured somebody would

break into his cabin. All through the years. Because the

kids would go through the dunes. See. We had a friend,

Elwood Decker, who was down there and they'd buy their groceries

and I'd drive 'em down to the beach and then right across from

where they'd go over the sand dunes and if they got a large

amount that they couldn't carry at one time, well I would

stay in the car and wait until they could come back for the

rest of it. Instead of leaving it there. (Gene: He had

talked about Elwood) Yes. Elwood is living in Denver now

and Jim Coffee is up at Point Reyes, up by San Francisco.

They were all friends. (Dr. Gerber has Elwood Decker's address)

Jim Coffee's address: P. O. Box 268, Point Reyes Station, CA.

94956. He never talked about his family or Holland; when we

did talk about flowers he did talk about the flowers there,

but that's about all. (He enjoyed his gardening. didn't he?)

Yes. Very much. I think things were real rough for him in Holland, from the things he said when he came here. And that was the reason he had come here. (Did he ever tell you how he came to choose his particular lifestyle?) Well, it was such a hassle -- everything else -- and then he worked for awhile and saved his money and he did tell me that he had invested in the May Co stock. That's where he made his money -- what money he had. And then he kept Crites yard and made \$30 a month and I think he lived on that \$30 a month. For years. His Social Security wasn't much. I used to cash his checks and it wasn't much. It was never over \$80. It was a very small amount. (Do you know about his life in the dunes)

No. He more or less kept to himself more than he did mix with the others. Even the other dunites. He didn't socialize that much. Jim was just down there two years. He was in the service and Pat O'Hara enlisted and went into the service. He was 39 when they called him and he didn't last but about a year and a half. They discharged him.

(Who was the one Bert always used to say was going to come back as a bird?) I don't know.

(Can you tell me anything about his basic philosophy of life?)

Well, he studied astrology and he, he firmly believed in it.

I think he enjoyed being alone. (Do you think he was ever

lonely?) No. Not really. No. I don't think so. I think

that he had something that I don't think we have. He had

something that, as far as I'm concerned, within himself that

he lived and I never saw Bert smile a lot. But I think he

was content. If you know what I mean. I think he was con-

tent because he didn't have to stay down there if he didn't

want to. He didn't want to work and he figured that he had

enough to live on. He chose his own way of life. (Did he

ever talk to you about religion?) No. Not really.

(Politics?) No. You see, we were in the store and people

were coming and going all the time, and you see, a lot of

this. . . We enjoyed him and we just treated him like we

like to be treated. That's the way we do our customers.

(Did you see any change in his temperament over the years?)

Oh yes. Right at the last, oh, I would say the last year.

He couldn't get in the store and get his stuff and get out

fast enough and a lot of times I had just drove him down

down to the creek because I just didn't think that he felt too good. When he got a lot of heavy stuff I'd take him down the beach so it was closer for him. It seemed to us like he needed more and more to be by himself. If the store was full he said, "Well, I'll be back. . .later." And he wouldn't buy what he really needed and I told him if he'd go ahead and order it and go get his mail we'd have it ready when he came back. (How often was he coming in the last year?)

Sometimes once a week, sometimes once every two weeks.

(What kinds of foods did he buy?) We picked up special breads for him. June would pick up special stuff for him because she comes right by there. We had it for a long time, then when the big store s come in they wouldn't deliver to us anymore. (Did he eat much fresh meat and that kind of things?) He bought an awful lot of hamburger. Very few steaks, but a lot of hamburger. (How did he keep it fresh?)

He just bought what he could use. (Do you know how or when he became interested in astrology?) I tell you what. I

think he studied up at San Jose at that -- I knew the name of it -- there's a cult up there. I'm quite sure you can find

(What do you feel interested him most?) Well, I wouldn't know what to say, other than that he read an awful lot.

He'd just mention different things at different times,

but not any particular book to me, or anything. (What do

you think meant the most to him in his life?) He enjoyed

his friends, he enjoyed the people that came to see him,

because he mentioned -- he wouldn't mention names, but he

mentioned people that were to see him and that he enjoyed

them coming. (Did he ever kid with you about being a saintly

man, a holy man?) No. (That rascal; he showed different

faces to different people) Yes, he did, apparently. He

studied you and he studied you. (What did you think of his

sense of humor?) I didn't think he had one too much. He

didn't seem to have. No. We used to try to kid him and he

took us so serious that . . . He was in the store one day

and this is something I said to him, just kidding, I knew

that he had some money, but not, you know, and I said, "Well,

Bert, I worked on my first million and gave up. How about

leaving me your first million and I'll work on my second? "

And he was just all shook up. He kind of got mad at me for

awhile. He wouldn't talk to me. Then he came to me one day and asked me about June. I said, "Well, she would appreciate anything he wanted to leave her and she had worked real hard and her husband had left her. So that's the only thing he ever said to me. (The people I know that got small settlements got them at the end of January) I really do think that that was his life, and people coming to see him. I think that was real important. (Did he leave the dunes to visit people often?) No. Very rarely. He left the people to come to him. I think Mr. Crites used to give him a lot of stuff. . . clothes. He ate mostly vegetables and a little meat. (Do you know anyone that he looked up to, admired?) The only person I've heard him talk a lot about was Mr. Crites. The older Crites. (What do you think bothered him most?) He was always afraid somebody was going to -- he got so when he came to the store he couldn't get back fast enough because he thought somebody would destroy his little place and go into it. That seemed to be the worry. (Did you know that he was interested in the stock market?) Yes.

He knew I'd inherited a little money and he told me about

May Co stock and said you ought to buy it. (Did he seem
interested in other material things?) Not really. It was
more of a game. It was. It was more of a game with him.

(Over the years, before this last phase, was his health
pretty good?) Yes. Yes. (How did he change during the

time you knew him?) He just became quieter and quieter.

He didn't want to stay in town at all. He just came to town
when he had to. (Did he ever tell you about his stowaway
episode -- when he went back to Holland for 14¢) No. But

that sounds like him. ~~How~~ How did he get back? (Probably worked
until he had the money. It was a great source of shame to his
family that he would stowaway.) (Was the fear based on things

that had happened to him?) I don't think so. But there was

things happening around our town -- with the children --

teenagers especially -- and they'd come through there and

tease him when they were back in the dunes. You know how

kids do -- they make remarks they shouldn't. So he just

figured if they ever came by when he wasn't there they'd

break out his wondiws and just demolish things, so. . .

I think as he got more ill this bothered him more. He just

didn't want to leave the place at all.

You see, when Harold wanted to take him ^{to} the hospital, he wouldn't go until the signs were just right. This was the thing. He knew that he was going to die. (Do you feel that he valued nature highly?) Yes. (In what ways?)

Well, he -- if he lived down there and that was his life -- and he spoke of different things, like in the dunes, and I think that and I would call that about as near nature as you can get when you live in a place like that. And there was a few rabbits and a few wild animals around that he enjoyed. (Did he have a garden? I know he grew his own mint.) He did at one time. In fact, he had quite a little garden.

(Other than the one he had in cans?) No. It was in cans.

No. He couldn't in that beach sand. It's all salt.

(Any incidents that you remember that occurred at the store?)

No. Just a time that he was feeling kind of bad and we had quite a few people come in and he just couldn't take it.

He'd say, "well, I'll be back later. . ." I'd open the store early and he'd come in early in the morning when we wouldn't be that busy. Sometimes when we'd deliver potatoes to him, he'd come in and pay for them and I'd make a date to

meet on the beach. He'd dig a big hole and bury the potatoes and fill it up with sand and that's how he stored his potatoes.

They never did rot. (And they didn't sprout either?) No. ^{Not}

in the salt. (If you were to describe Bert, how would you do

it?) Oh, he was a kindly person. You meet some people and

you know them, you meet others, but never know them, but I

felt like I knew Bert. Until I made the remark about his first

million, we were pretty good friends. (He got over that

eventually though?) Well, he got so sick, you see, that

I just never knew. I always felt so bad about it. He always

felt like people would try to come down there and rob him if

they thought he had any money, so this is why he took it so

seriously. He tried to live like he just didn't have a thing.

(What did you value most about him?) Well, what would you

say? What did you value about him? I think it would be

about the same thing with me. (I thought he was a very

unusual human being.) That's right. He was interesting.

And I enjoyed him. He was just a different type of person

and people would say to me, "What do you see in the kooks?"

and I'd say, "You might call them kooks but I think they are

very interesting people. You can see the common run, you

can see them on the street and you can meet a dozen of 'em
a day and what do you get out of it? You don't get a THING
out of it. But Bert gave you something. He gave you something
of himself. He gave you something of himself and I don't know
how to describe it, because I felt at ease around Bert and I
just enjoyed him a lot. I thought he was a very fine person.
(Did knowing him in any way change your life?) I don't know.

It makes you stop and think sometimes, and, didn't he you?

(Definitely. . .about values and so forth?) Yes. (Whether
we were valuing the right things?) Yes. That's right.

He made you think and he wasn't pushy with what he thought.

Some people, if they think they know something and that's
just the right thing, that's just what everybody should

think, but Bert was never that way. I think he had a lot to
offer and that he didn't push it on you. (How do you think

he chose his friends?) I just don't know. I think a lot of

people found him down there in the dunes and enjoyed him and

returned again, is what I think. ^KBecause, he wasn't out

and around. This is the thing I think, because now I knew

and
him a long time/he never did make a remark about ever going

anyplace or doing anything.

(He came to the dunes in '40 or '41, is my understanding.

Did you know him through all those years?) Yes. I'm bound to

have...He lived on very little. But do you know, if you stop

and think yourself, if you were -- now I know myself -- I don't

eat like I used to. When I was working I ate three meals a

day, but I eat three meals a day or more, but I don't eat

that much. I don't think he ate an awful lot, but he ate

good food. He had a balanced diet. (Having come to your

store for so many years, did you get the feeling he knew

other people that were there when he was?) Not too much.

No. Not too much. There was people that came and met him

there at the store and just-about knew just about when he

came. That lived on the mesa. (Kathy Jones?) Yes. They

talked to him more than anyone. (I didn't know she shopped

there.) She didn't. She'd meet him there. (Gene: Where

you saw him was in a store -- he would act one way; but, in

his home where it's his then it's a different thing. People

were there on his terms and if they don't adhere to his

terms they're not welcome, or welcome to come back.)

He was king of his own domain. That's right. That's right.

(He talked about his castle all the time.) That's right.

He was a real fine person as far as I'm concerned. (Did you ever visit him at the shack?) No.