

The following is an excerpt of

The Thrill of the Chase: A Memoir

by Forrest Fenn

Release date: October 25, 2010

Somewhere in the mountains north of Santa Fe, New Mexico, a treasure is hidden. In his new memoir, Forrest Fenn gives readers the clues needed to unlock the secret of the treasure's location.

Media Inquiries:

Irene Rawlings
3400 Federal Boulevard
Denver, CO 80211
303.458.1045
303.921.3342 (cell)
irawlings@earthlink.net

Book orders:

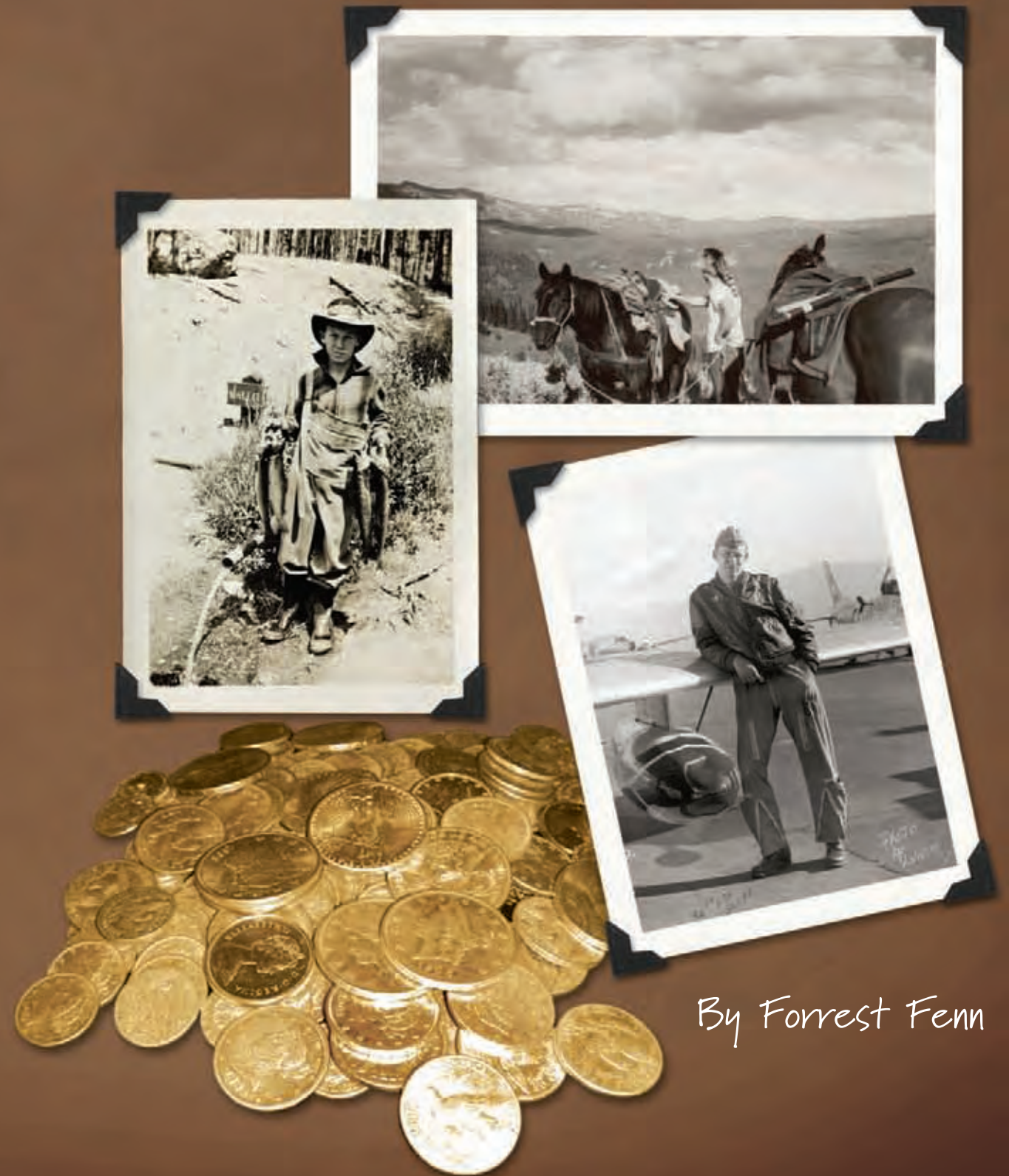
thrill@cwbookstore.com
Collected Works Bookstore
202 Galisteo Street
Santa Fe, NM 87501
505.988.4226
www.cwbookstore.com

The Thrill of the Chase

A Memoir



PHOTOGRAPHY: Addison Doty



By Forrest Fenn

All of the stories that mingle among these pages are as true to history as one man can average out that truth, considering the fact that one of my natural instincts is to embellish just a little. Nevertheless, the story about my treasure chest is true, and if it doesn't stir your spirit then I hope at least it brings a smile in one of your dreams.


And please don't fret too much if some of the things I say don't appeal to you. Instead, keep in mind that the temperament of the country was different in the 1930s, when I was a tyke and Wimpy hamburgers were a nickel. If it will bother you to read that I shot meadowlarks so my family could have food on the table, then please don't read further. I did that more than once, and candor demands that I admit to being as proud of it today as my father was of me then, when I was eight. Please overlook my slight penchant for provocation and realize that all of us are environmentalists to some degree, and me more than most. My church is in the mountains and along the river bottoms where dreams and fantasies alike go to play.

Varied are the many roads I've travelled to reach my eighty years and not all have been paved with smiles and accolades. If to be content has been my goal then I've been successful my share of the time. But that's not to boast about all that happened along the way. Gaining experience wasn't always peaceful, especially during my early years of anxiety.

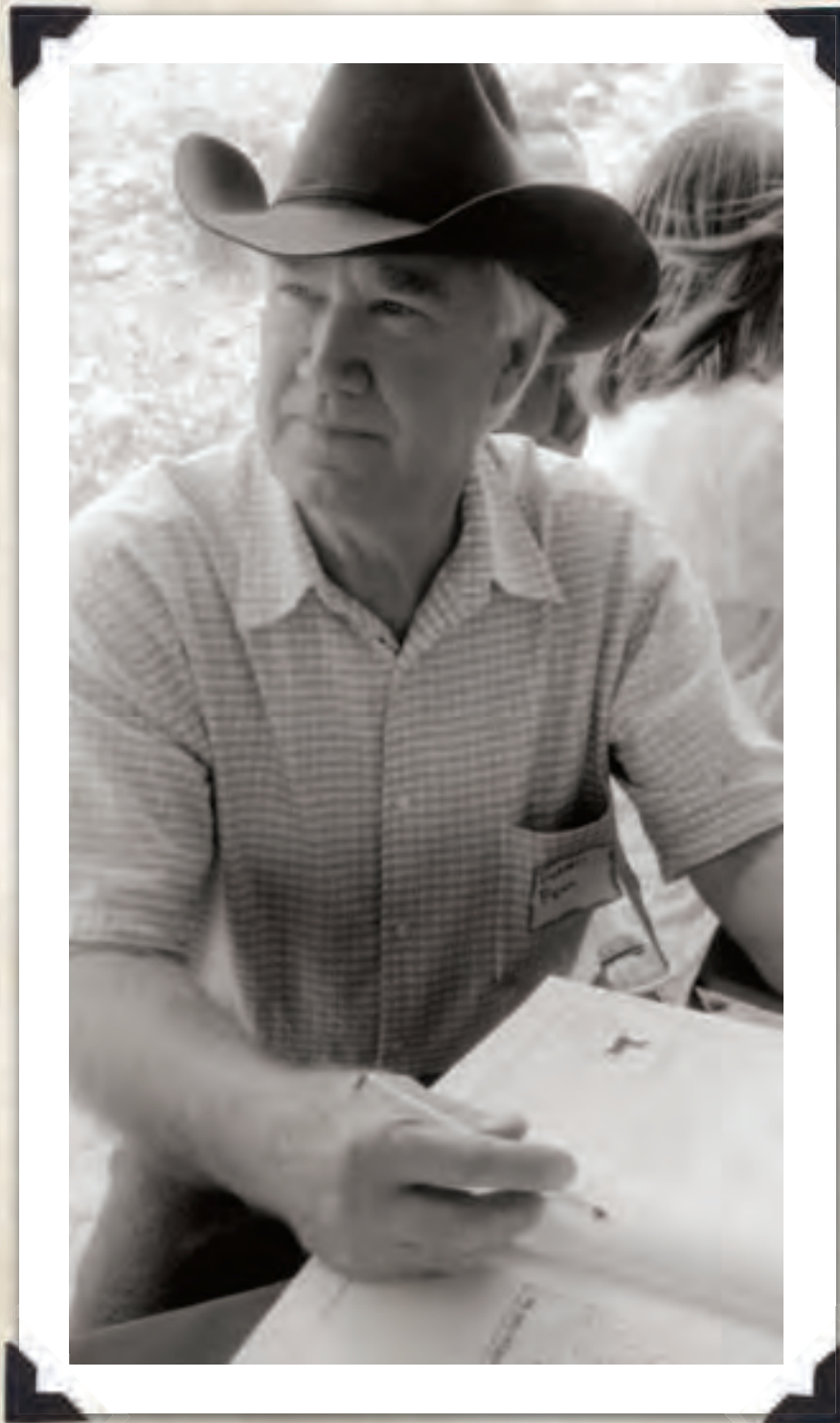
I tend to use some words that aren't in the dictionary, and others that are, I bend a little. My only goal in this endeavor is to talk about a few of my life experiences and if any readers over the age of twelve don't see a little of themselves in this mirror, then maybe they deserve another turn.

This book is my ninth in twenty-six years of casually recounting the things I enjoy most. My books have to write themselves or I struggle. This one did.

"Life is a game of poker,
Happiness is the pot.
Fate deals you four cards and a joker,
And you play whether you like it or not."



*This book is dedicated to
those who love the thrill of the chase.*



The author signing books
at the turquoise mine.

GYPSY MAGIC

KATY RR TRACKS



42

In the spring when the weather was warm, I used to raise the window that was at the side of my bed and put my pillow on the sill. I slept that way whenever I could. The Katy railroad tracks were about a half-mile from our house and late at night I could hear the steam engines puff and the engineers blow their air horns. It was a soothing sound and sometimes I think I can still hear it when the wind is out of the east.

The gypsies came through town several times a year in their horse-pulled wagons that had rubber tires. They camped down by the tracks in a big circle. At night they built a large fire in the middle and five or six girls of all ages danced around it, their hands swishing long skirts back and forth to the beat of Cajun accordions and harmonica music. Some of the men played fiddles.

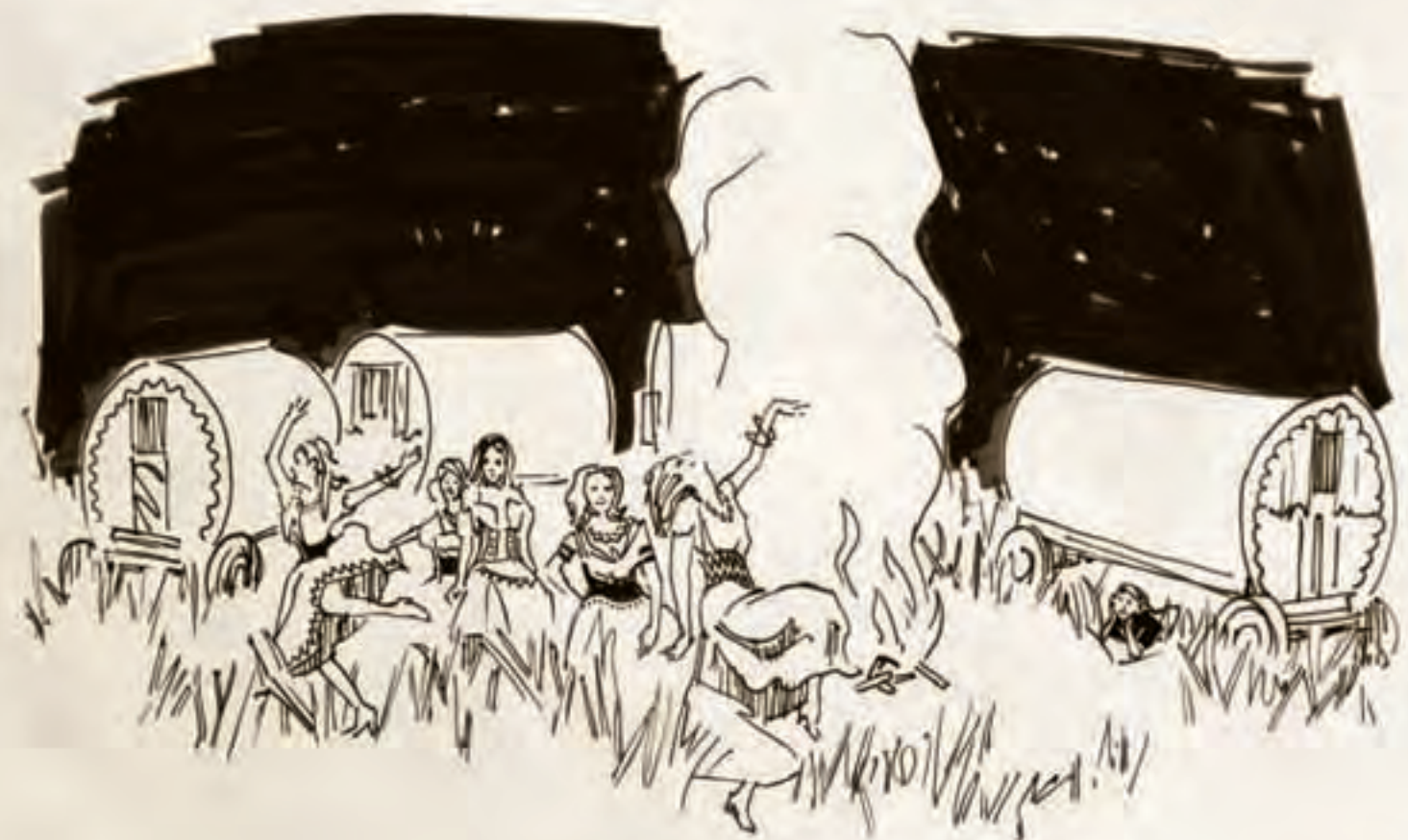
If my head was in the window I could hear the sound and instantly knew what it was. The screen was easy to unlatch so I'd jump to the ground and run as fast as I could through the cemetery and across a wide field toward the firelight. By lying on my stomach under a wagon, and pushing the tall grass aside, I could really see up close. The flashing flames made dancing shadows that seemed to move with the music, and there were times when I thought the girls

GYPSY MAGIC

43

saw me as they swirled by, but no one said anything. I touched them with my eyes and became part of it as I moved back and forth in the sway. I always stayed until the fire died down and the music stopped. But sometimes I still hear it in my dreams. ■

The Main Street
Cowboys





Peggy modeling
her swimsuit



High school sweethearts

Our wedding,
Dec. 27, 1953



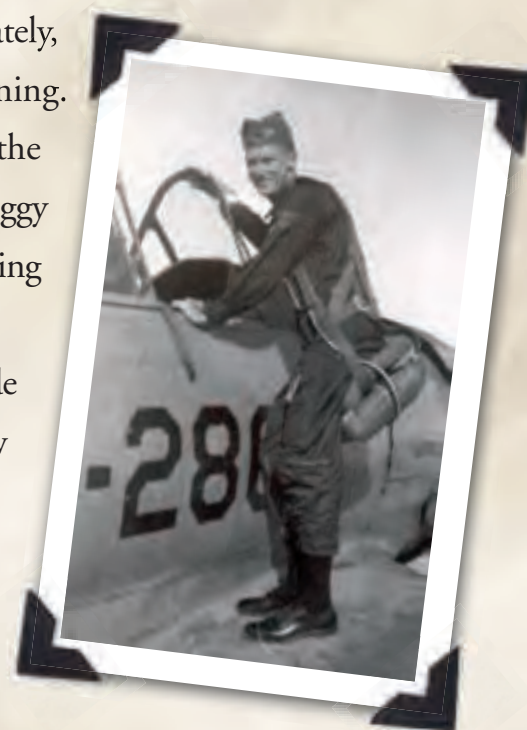
MY WAR FOR ME



The Korean War had started three months earlier so I joined the Air Force as a private and was sent to radar mechanics school in Biloxi. A big, ugly, sergeant gave me purpose for the first time in my life and it wasn't very funny. Sometimes just lasting something out can be a triumph. To get away I volunteered for everything I could find in the manuals. Fortunately, they needed pilots and I was accepted into training.

The problem was that I was in love with the most beautiful girl you could find anywhere. Peggy Jean Proctor was her name and we had been dating for a few years. She was in Houston going to college and I was traveling all over the countryside trying to learn to fly airplanes. Everyone knew that she was too good for me but tenacity was never one of my shortcomings, if you know what I mean. Graduation from pilot training was in September and we were married after she got her degree, three months later. I had plush assignments and my wife was always by my side.

In my first fighter squadron I flew the F-86D, which held the world's speed record at the time.



I learned to fly in the
T-6, which was the
hardest airplane in the
world to land—1953

After being hoisted out of the Laotian Jungle and returned to friendly territory at Nakhon Phanom, Thailand, it was time to give some thanks. In the center is Lt. Col. John Carlson, who led a flight of four fighters and strafed around my position on the ground to keep enemy heads down. The helicopter pilot, Lt. Cmdr. Lance Eagan, shakes my hand while we all grin and rehash the rescue mission. They showed their strength when I needed it the most. How do you thank guys like that?



The "survivor" on the left (me) and the men who extracted me from the deep jungle in Laos. They are all heroes many times over, as is the Jolly Green Giant helicopter behind. Her name is the Candy Ann. From left to right: Lt. Col. John Carlson - Sandy lead; Lt. James Jamerson - Sandy 4; Lt. Col. John H.I. Morse - Commander of the rescue unit and co-pilot of the Candy Ann; A/1C Robert J. Sully, the Parachute Jumper who pulled me into the helicopter; Lt. Cmdr. Lance Eagan - pilot of the Candy Ann; Flight Engineer M/Sgt. Lee R. Maples, who had his hand on the cable cutter.



Peggy & Forrest
at Fenn Galleries, LTD

BLUE JEANS AND HUSH PUPPIES AGAIN

105

When I became a civilian again after twenty years of military life, my retired pay was \$12,000 a year, which was adequate to sustain my family of four. We just had to forego a few luxuries like Dr. Peppers and downtown movies. But Lubbock was windy, flat and sedentary, and we could hear the mountains calling. My wife tells the story that when she suggested we move to New Mexico I jumped up and down on my hat, but I don't remember that.

My daughters, Kelly and Zoe, although young, were becoming more and more ambitious for me. The list of people who could afford to dress like they wanted to was very short, and their names weren't on it. So we built an art gallery in Santa Fe and our world started at the bottom again. We learned that a mattress on the floor wasn't bad at all and that we could plaster walls and watch the Cowboys play at the same time. Although our learning curve was flat at first, it was never dull.

The character building lessons of defeat were numerous. One time a lady interviewed me live on Santa Fe Public Radio. Her last question was, "Mr. Fenn, what are the most enjoyable things in life?" I thought for just a second and replied, "A good sneeze, a good scratch and self-pity." I guess it doesn't pay to be so honest, because

she quickly broke to a commercial and then disappeared out the side door.

Our gallery soon became a cistern for ideas and opportunities that constantly flowed into it, but I didn't always know if a deal was good or bad. One time a friend came into our gallery with an art dealer from Amarillo. The two of them talked me into giving \$5,500 for a black and white oil painting by Gilbert Gaul, who was a Civil War painter with good credentials. I hated to borrow the money, but I did. The scene depicted a man standing on a wooden bridge holding a smoking pistol, with a dead dog at his feet bleeding all over the boards.

Well, over the next few years I tried to sell the painting to everyone I knew and the response was always the same: rolled eyes and an inquiry about the nearest restroom. I finally traded the poor thing to a museum for a small French watercolor, which I happily sold for \$1,500. It pictured a bunch of fairies dancing around a rock, if you can believe I'd come to that.

But the result of the whole episode was inordinately profitable for us because it was so educational. I learned about friends, art dealers from Amarillo, Gilbert Gaul, black and white paintings, smoking guns, and dead dogs bleeding on bridges – and I never made many of those mistakes again. Sometimes my memory can have a very long attention span. ■



Kelly & Zoe



GOLD AND MORE

127

In my mind I've always been the best in the world at collecting fun things. My career started early with soda pop caps because they were plentiful, free and easy to find: Dr. Pepper, Pepsi, Nehi, Upper 10, Blatz, 7UP, Royal Punch, Coca Cola, Lemon Sour, Orange Crush, Julep Lime and lots more. They all fizzed in my mouth and that's what I liked. I stayed away from diet drinks because I didn't want to lose weight.

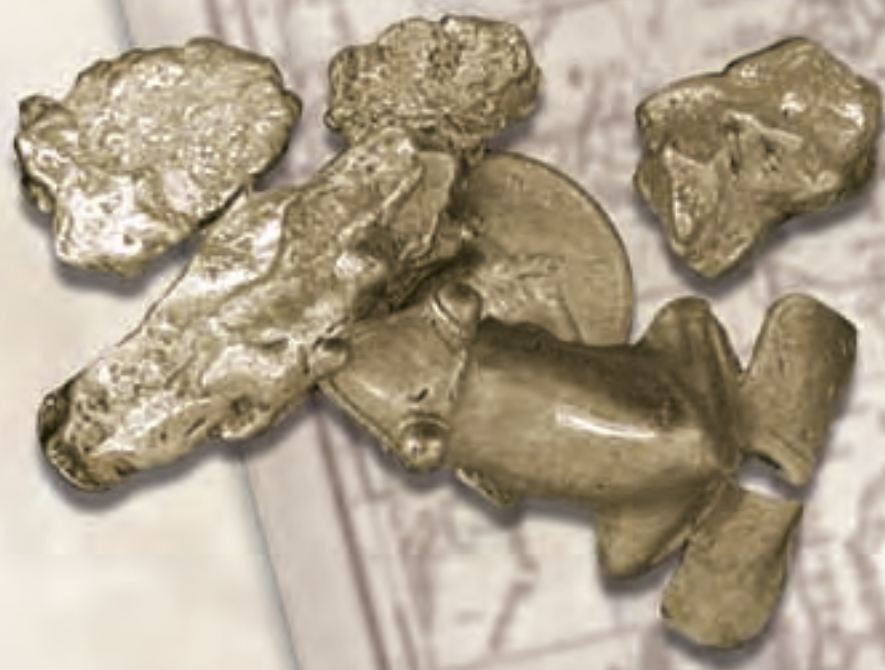
My favorite soda was Grapette but the bottle it came in was so small there was almost no room for the drink inside. But I didn't care, I just drank it anyway. One of my rules was that I couldn't collect the cap unless I first drank the pop, but that idea wasn't too good because I didn't have enough nickels to sustain it. When my father grew weary of seeing my great cap collection strewn around the house – like on the floor, on the dresser, on the radio and other places – he formulated a plan that would end my promising career. He went around to all of the gas stations in town that sold soda pops and gathered up hundreds of caps, maybe even thousands. When he gave them to me I quickly lost interest. How could I continue to collect bottle caps when it looked like I already had all that were ever made?

Then I started collecting string, and no kind or color was immune to my desire for it, but most pieces were white. The best

saving technique was to tie one end of the new piece of string onto the end of the last one. I knew all of the good tricks, and one was to tie only square knots so they wouldn't slip.

Soon I had a multi-colored ball that got larger and larger with each tie-on. I hoped to tie on at least three strings a day, and after a year or so the ball was so large it couldn't go through my bedroom door.

Then one afternoon when I walked home from school in the rain my string had disappeared. It just wasn't there anymore. I tried to explain to my mother that since the ball couldn't get out of my room it was somewhat difficult for anyone to steal it. She didn't answer, but just kept nodding and looking out of the window. I think she was watching for the postman or something. Even to this day the mystery of what happened to my string ball remains one of the great unsolved crimes in my family.



Over the next fifty years, my eclectic collections grew to excessive proportions: beaded Indian moccasins, fore-edge painted books, weather vanes, ancient Egyptian jewelry, arrowheads, pocket knives and antiques of all kinds.

And then I got a cancer. After a one-hour operation turned into five, my doctor said I had a 20% chance of living three years. Most everyone thought I was going to die, including me. The radiologist only said that I faced an uphill battle. How's that for a mind expanding prognosis?

Lying in bed at three o'clock in the morning, unable to sleep, gave me time to ponder and riffle through my brain looking for answers that I didn't think were there. All sorts of things entered my mind. At age fifty-eight I had spent more than nineteen years asleep, and three of those years were on Monday. Think about that for a minute. Surely that's a design deficiency of some sort.

There was no hero anywhere in me and everything I thought about radiated an aura of misfortune. But nature can be lenient at times, like with Olga, and I figured I had at least a year to live. Strokes and heart attacks don't listen to reason so cancer was probably the best choice if I could have made the selection myself. Before, I had been happy with where my life was, but now, what I seemed to lack in time remaining was conspicuously exceeded by my sudden desire for more of it.

Then one night, after the probability of my fate had finally hit bottom, I got an idea. It had been so much fun building my collection over the decades, why not let others come searching for some of it while I'm still here, and maybe continue looking for it after I'm gone? So I decided to fill a treasure chest with gold and jewels, then secret it – leaving clues on how to find it for any searcher

willing to try. It was a perfect match of mind and moment. Ha, I liked the idea but it would take some planning and the clock was ticking. No matter how far away a date is on the calendar, it always seems to arrive sooner in the face of unpleasant situations like mine.

Fortunately, I talked a museum friend into selling me his beautiful cast bronze chest that had three-dimensional female figures on its four sides and on the lid. I know I paid way too much for it but once in a while something comes along that is so special as to discount all logical rules of value. An excited antique scholar said the chest was probably a Romanesque Lock Box that dated to about 1150 AD. He also thought it might have once held a family bible or a Book of Days. Now it could hold my ancient jewelry and solid gold pieces. I was delighted. It was the perfect treasure chest.

I also wanted to include something personal with the treasure because maybe the lucky finder would want to know a little about the foolish person who abandoned such an opulent cache. So I placed a 20,000 word autobiography in the chest. It's in a small glass jar and the lid is covered with wax to protect the contents from moisture. The printed text is so small that a magnifying glass is needed to read the words. I tried to think of everything.

Then I started filling the chest with gold coins, mostly old American eagles and double eagles, along with lots of placer nuggets from Alaska. Two weigh more than a pound each and there are hundreds of smaller ones. Also included are pre-Columbian gold animal figures and ancient Chinese human faces carved from jade. The different objects in the cache are too numerous to mention one by one, but among them are a Spanish 17th century gold ring with a large emerald that was found with a metal detector, and an antique ladies gold dragon coat bracelet that contains 254 rubies, six emeralds, two Ceylon sapphires, and numerous small diamonds.

And with some reluctance I included a small silver bracelet that has twenty-two turquoise disc beads set side-by-side in a row. It fit snug to my arm and I loved it, but its history is what appealed to me the most. Richard Wetherell excavated the beads from a ruin in 1898, and a Navaho silversmith made the bracelet for him the same year. In 1901 Wetherell sold it to Fred Harvey, the hotel magnate. Sixty-four years later I won it playing pool with Byron Harvey, an heir of Fred's.

One of the prizes in my collection, a Tairona and Sinu Indian necklace from Columbia, is also part of the treasure. It contains thirty-nine animal fetishes carved from quartz crystal, carnelian, jadeite and other exotic stones. But special to the necklace are two cast gold objects – one, a jaguar claw and the other, a frog with bulbous eyes and legs cocked as if ready to spring. I held the 2,000-year-old piece of jewelry one last time and could almost feel its ancient power, its supremacy, before I finally lowered it into the



chest and closed the lid. A little of me is also inside the box. There must be a few Indiana Jones types out there, like me, ready to throw a bedroll in the pickup and start searching, with a reasonable chance of discovering a treasure chest containing more than twenty troy pounds of gold. For me, it was always the thrill of the chase. What do you think?

I knew exactly where to hide the chest so it would be difficult to find but not impossible. It's in the mountains somewhere north of Santa Fe. Indecision is the key to flexibility and that's why I waited so long to secret my cache. George Burns was 100 years old when someone asked him how his health was. He replied, "My health's good, it's my age that's killing me." And like Eric Sloane, at age almost-eighty, I figured it was time to act. So I wrote a poem containing nine clues that if followed precisely, will lead to the end of my rainbow and the treasure:

As I have gone alone in there
And with my treasures bold,
I can keep my secret where,
And hint of riches new and old.

Begin it where warm waters halt
And take it in the canyon down,
Not far, but too far to walk.
Put in below the home of Brown.

From there it's no place for the meek,
The end is ever drawing nigh;
There'll be no paddle up your creek,
Just heavy loads and water high.



My Father — born 1903

EPILOGUE



145

Now as I look back with the vision of seventy-nine years to lean against, I wonder what I've learned – and several things come to mind. I've learned that having enough money is much better than having a lot of money, because casual cash propagates idle fingers. And I've learned that anguish wrought by misdeeds made in later life comes in larger doses than with misdeeds made in adolescence. Only an experience can teach thoroughly and with a speed that is not always available in the classroom. Embarrassing incidents educate the best and the fastest and can come with a lasting sting. And what I've learned that's most important is that both countries and people should know enough to just leave other folks alone and do a better job of protecting our planet.

My father was a dedicated educator and he went about his day as adroitly as any of the best in his time. At age eighty-three he took his own life in order to defeat a cancer that had chewed on his pancreas for too long. He was not going to let it beat him. I admired him for making such a sensible and brave decision. His funeral was held at the large First Baptist Church in Temple, Texas, and he had it all planned: who the pastor would be, who would sing which songs, what kind of flowers he wanted and who should sit where.

The sanctuary was filled and maybe a hundred friends were standing outside, hoping to hear the words that were being spoken with such passion and eloquence. The preacher said that it was probably the largest crowd he had ever seen at a funeral. It was a testimonial to who my father was and how his life affected nearly all humans with whom he mingled. I can't remember how many times, when walking down the street with my father, a man would come up to us and say, "You're Mr. Fenn, aren't you? You gave me a few spankings when I was in junior high." My father would always ask, "Well, did you deserve the spankings?" The man would grin, "Well, yes." "Then I'm glad I gave you the lickings because you look like a fine man now." That's what my father always said. He had it down. Most likely the other guy would mumble something like, "I just wanted to shake your hand," and they both would smile as life continued.

His name was William Marvin Fenn. He molded so many lives and made such a huge and far-reaching impact on the local society that I was sure everyone would remember him forever. Yet when I looked him up on Google I discovered that he's buried



alongside my mother in row 4 of block 23 at the Hillcrest Cemetery, and that's about it. Maybe history doesn't want us to remember everything we've learned, and that's why the grass grows so tall over a French soldier's headstone in Vietnam.

Now I feel that my father is sitting on the edge of a cloud somewhere watching. If he knows everything about me he's pretty busy lighting candles, some of them on both ends. But I hope he knows that I've been sometimes guilty only by innuendo, and that's why I wrote my epitaph with such profundity:

I wish I could have lived to do, the things I was attributed to.

No time spent in thought is wasted and nothing is too small to know, so one should not let knowing a little bit be a substitute for learning more. The aspirations of youth grow weak where they languish on the shelves of patience, and some of the things I've enjoyed the most in my life have come from the smallest voices. That a butterfly is really a "flutterby" is one example.

In writing this memoir I've rediscovered things about myself I thought were long forgotten. It would be nice to start life over and do it all again. I'd change so much, but only for the sake of new adventures. And that's why I think youth should always be wasted on the young. But what do I know?

The past will always be contradictory when told by one person at a time. I feel my life has been a rough draft of the place just ahead where the past will come alive again and all of my experiences and friends through the years will meet with me at the great banquet table of history. Then there will be no past. ■