

West Texas, Steinway Pianos, & The Explorers Club

by

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Part 1: West Texas

Prelude – September, 2004

April 2005 Explorers Club Program in Alpine

“You may have been to the Chisos Mountains, Lajitas and Santa Elena Canyon in the lower Big Bend, but have you been to Sierra Vieja, Ruidosa and Candelaria in the upper Big Bend? How about Vieja Pass, Camp Holland, the O2 Ranch, the Chinati Hot Springs, Pinto Canyon, and the Rio Grande Rift Valley?”

The upper Big Bend is the target of our April 15-17, 2005 spring program, and will be based in salubrious Alpine in Far West Texas, which boasts one of the most comfortable climates in the state. At an altitude of 4,481 feet, the April daytime temperatures are typically in the high 70s to very low 80s. Our hosts will be Sul Ross University and the Museum of the Big Bend. Our evening speakers will feature geologist Jay Quade of the University of Arizona, and Richard Fisher, Director of Wilderness Expeditions, both of Tucson, specialists in worldwide studies of rift valleys and canyons respectively. Our field trip guides will be archeologist Bob Mallouf, Director of the Center for Big Bend Studies, upper Big Bend historian Glenn Justice, Jeff Francell with the Texas Chapter of the Audubon Society, and Jon Kalb, research fellow with the University of Texas.

Both “heavy duty” and “light duty” field trips will be offered: an over night trip to the Rio Grand Rift; tours of prehistoric and historic sites; a birding excursion to the Davis Mountains; a “star party” at McDonald Observatory; tours of the Donald Judd home and the Chinati Art Museum in Marfa; tour of World War II Camp Russell in Marfa; the Shafter ghost town; forts built on the Cibolo Creek Ranch by Milton Faver near Shafter; and the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Center and Botanical Gardens near Fort Davis.

For those who want to extend their visit, special excursions will be offered in the nearby Big Bend Ranch State Park--to the Solitario, one of the largest craters in the world, and Madrid Falls, the second highest waterfall in Texas.

Historic accommodations in Alpine and the surrounding area include: the Holland Hotel in Alpine; the Limpia Hotel and the Prude Guest Ranch in Fort Davis; the Paisano Hotel in Marfa; the Gage Hotel in Marathon; and the sumptuous Cibolo Ranch near Shafter.”

The above words were printed in the July 2004 edition of Texas Chapter of The Explorers Club newsletter. At an Explorers Club dinner in Houston in March 2004, I was talking to Bill Gruy, the president of the club’s Texas Chapter, about ideas I had of organizing a trip for the club to West Texas. Jon Kalb overheard us talking, and immediately volunteered to help organize a trip near Big Bend to study the geology of the area. Even then, Jon could not hide the passion he feels for the Rio Grande Rift Valley, which is similar to the Great African Rift Valley in Ethiopia, where he has spent eight years of his life looking for fossils. I had first heard of Jon two or three years earlier, when he spoke to

The Explorers Club in Austin about his role in finding the Lucy, the first skeleton of a 3.2 million year old female *hominid* ever found, for which the team led by Donald Johanson received the credit in 1974. Jon's book, Adventures in the Bone Trade, had just been released a few months before he spoke; in it, he wrote a very detailed explanation of the highly competitive and political atmosphere and clandestine intrigue during and following the search for Lucy in the Sixties, a different version from the better known Johanson account.

Within a couple of months after the dinner in Houston, Jon had an agenda planned for the club members in April, 2005 that could be compared to highballing a train in the yard – hang on and don't stand in the way or you will be run over! After spending four days with him, there was no doubt that he was the engineer on that train, and I was barely hanging onto the end rails of the caboose. This story is about those four days. A week before the Labor Day weekend, Jon sent me an email inviting me to go with him on a scouting mission and/or a dry run for the April trip. With my good and trusty old red Ford F-250 4X4 truck (special for you, Murray!) always begging me to take it out of the Houston area, I just couldn't deny it the chance to go on a good 4-wheel drive jaunt.

Thursday, September 2nd

I had left work a couple hours earlier on Wednesday to avoid the Houston traffic at stall hour, but I was unprepared to encounter the same kind of traffic this morning enroute to Jon's house from my motel. I guess Austin has its own traffic headaches. I met his wife Judy, we chitchatted while I ate some coffeecake that she fixed, then Jon and I loaded the truck, and we were off before 9 AM, stopping an hour or so later at Fredericksburg for some beef jerky smoked over peach tree wood and a couple of chocolate éclairs. We drove west on US Highway 290 until just before the town of Junction, where we picked up I-10 (we really didn't pick it up – just took the exit for it - my truck is good, but not that good!). At Ft. Stockton, we ate lunch at a Mexican restaurant that Jon knew about.

By 4 PM we were pulling into the Big Bend Museum at the Sul Ross University in Alpine. This is one of those universities hidden on the western side of the state that I haven't heard much about, but if I had grown up in Texas and was looking for a school away from the big cities, it would have been at the top of my list. In fact, whenever I retire I may go there for a few months just to take some Big Bend geology classes. I guess the school doesn't have much in engineering, but is big on geology. However, with my interest in satellites and remote sensing, I imagine by now they may offer classes along those lines. Not too far from Alpine is Ft. Davis; beyond that town is the McDonald Observatory, where I could possibly find a job that is space related, although the people who work there probably aren't too concerned about the manned space program. At the university, we met Bob Mallouf, Director of the Center for Big Bend Studies,

an anthropologist who studies and finds old Indian ruins. When the club meets in April, he may be leading one of the tours.

Jon had two rooms reserved for us at the Antelope Lodge on the western side of town. My friend Hawks Abbott (aka CAPT Oozic) may be coming out in April from Virginia for the club weekend; if he does, I don't think it would be wise for me to have him to stay here. The lobby of the motel has a rock shop glued to it. Not just a little rock shop, but one with two or three rooms of rocks with many colors and all kinds and shapes and names that I find hard to pronounce. Hawks would want to spend the entire weekend there; it would be difficult to drag him a way.

Not too much exciting happened that night. We ate at a bar-b-que and steak house and had for our waitress a young college girl. She is actually from Houston. For dessert Jon had blackberry cobbler with ice cream on it and the girl told us she really worked hard because she had been picked the berries very early in the morning, went to school, studied by candlelight, had to go to work and turn the homemade ice cream mixer, then had to wait tables and cook dinner and wash the dishes. I think all three of us enjoyed the bantering back and forth, but I bet she didn't give another thought to the two geezers once they left.

After dinner, Jon and I drove downtown and wandered into the Holland Hotel, where Jon previously had booked some rooms for the club next April. He wanted to find out the room rates. I guess the hotel is well known, but the lobby looked more like a shopping arcade. We went back to the Antelope Lodge and went to our separate rooms. Later, I went outside and called Karoline on my cell phone. It was so great to be standing outside with no mosquitoes and low humidity. Although the lights of motel were present, I looked with wonder at the clarity of the night sky with the Milky Way band on stage. I could easily understand why the McDonald Observatory is located in this part of the country.

Friday, September 3rd

Jon is a good guy to have as a traveling companion, but when it comes to waking up and having an early start, the mild-mannered man's alter ego of a drill sergeant takes command. We had agreed that we would meet at 7 AM (perhaps I should say 0700!) and my phone was ringing around 6:30 (make that 0630). We left Alpine in the dark to go have breakfast in Marfa. His thermostat and mine also live in different temperature zones. He wanted the air on the day before when we were driving in 75° F. temps; now that it was a nice cool morning he wanted the heater turned on. I turned on the heater until I could no longer stand it, then gradually I lowered my window to enjoy the cool morning air.

We ate at a local café frequented by cowboys and the border patrol. On the wall somebody had painted a huge map of the area and while we waited for our breakfast to be served Jon pointed out our destinations. Then I filled the

tanks on the truck while Jon called some people. After a quick trip to a grocery store we headed west on US 90, driving through the small town of Valentine. Between Marfa and Valentine the border patrol or DEA or some other government agency has a huge aerostat (fancy word for balloon or blimp). After I came home I found out that Lockheed Martin has people working there. If we lose our contract at the Johnson Space Center in Houston next year, perhaps I may seek a transfer to this place.

Shortly after we left Valentine we turned off the road to the Clay Miller ranch. We gained access to the ranch when we came upon two guys who were studying dung beetles. The things that people do to make a living! They knew a short cut road into the ranch, but I'm not so sure it was. But even if it wasn't, it gave me the first opportunity to put my truck in 4-Wheel drive. It had rained a day or two earlier; there were still some big muddy puddles to go through, slipping and a sliding and trying to stay in the ruts, or sometimes out of the ruts. I probably didn't have to use the 4x4, but I did. My happy muddy truck just looked like it belonged in a TV commercial! After several miles, we came to the ranch house and visited Mr. and Mrs. Miller. They were kind enough to chat with us and give us permission to travel on their land.

We headed up the road by a stone water tank where two cowboys were working. Turns out, they are the sons of Mr. Miller. And cowboys they are. Nothing TV about them. I'm sure in their eyes I stood out as a city slicker. But I respect them and their land; I grew up in Wyoming and understand about closing gates and not going onto ranch land without permission, and certainly, not to do any hunting or fishing without permission, and not to leave any trash behind, or take anything. These guys work hard and probably play hard, and might even drink hard. They are tough. They are the American West. Cattle don't know or care that this is the 21st century or that man has gone to the moon. But they understand water, and these cowboys understand that the cattle need the water and will work hard to make sure that they have it. One told me there was a pipeline going to the water tank from a spring. Before the tank and pipeline were installed many years ago, the cattle died trying to make it to that spring. These two cowboys were working to make sure that water still flows from the spring to the tank to keep their cattle alive. That's what they were doing this day. Probably not the only thing. Certainly, working at a water tank is only one of the many things they do as a cowboy. These two guys are in my age bracket; I may have seen more of the world than they have, taken more photographs, and written more words describing my adventures (perhaps not), but if it came down to survival or fixing a broken truck or mending a fence or a broken windmill, building a barn or rounding up the cattle to brand or take to the summer or the winter range, or even going for a horseback ride, or hammering out a new horseshoe, or welding, or working on a pipeline to a stone-covered water tank, well, I don't think there is any doubt that you would want these guys on your side. Then again, you wouldn't want them against you.

Directions to Vieja Pass were given to us; one of the cowboys moved his truck so I could pass. We crossed a creek and then followed the road to the right. Perhaps one-half mile later the road turns left, and heads up a steep hill. Maybe other people could drive up the hill without being in 4-high, but I chose to, and I am glad that I made that decision. Sometimes Jon stepped out and gave me hand signals; a couple of times he removed the rocks that prevented me from going forward. We bounced up the hill. The one cowboy (Alfred? – I don't remember his name for sure) told us that the border patrol had used the road the day before, so it should be passable. After making it up the rough part, and making a couple of turns, the Rio Grande rift valley came into view. Near the top of one ridge we could look back at the ranch house and could also see the remains of Camp Holland. For another mile or two we followed the road to where there was a junction and took the left road that was near some box canyons. I guess if we had gone to the right we could have driven over the Rim Rock for several miles, either towards or on the Sierra Vieja Mountain.

Finally, the road made another left turn and we came to hill that looked like it might be at a 45° angle and go up quite a distance. Perhaps we were chicken, I don't know. But conscious of my own lack of skill level, and unsure whether or not I could make it, I decided not to risk it. We parked the truck and took a hike through the brush and the cactus to have a better view of the Rio Grande rift valley. I guess that over the summer the area had had quite a bit of rain, so I had several opportunities to photograph wild flowers, in addition to the spectacular views we encountered looking over the river into Mexico. I don't know how far we hiked – it could have been a mile or so. The one photograph I had in mind for my truck ended when I ran out of film perhaps a quarter of a mile away. Oh, well. I still had a good geology lesson from Jon. As we walked along the rim, he gave a running commentary of the different rocks and formations. That night I took a black thorn about a half-of-an-inch long from a cactus that had penetrated my leg and was surprised that it didn't fester.

We ate our lunch near Cottonwood Creek. Then it was time to head on back to the ranch. At one point when I was driving down the rough section of road, it seemed as though the left side of the truck was leaning towards the deep ravine below at an angle of 45° or more. For my adrenaline-filled body, it may have only been 30°, but I asked God a prayer, and He kept the truck from rolling. Thank you God for keeping us safe on this exhilarating ride!

We took another road near the stone tank to Camp Holland. WOW! It was built for the army in the days when the Federales chased Poncho Villa: *"The Federales say, we could have him any day, we only let him slip away, out of kindness I suppose,"* sings Willie Nelson in his song, "Lefty and Poncho". My friend "Pat" Patrick says it wasn't because of kindness that the Federales let him slip away, but because they couldn't catch him. I tend to believe Patrick more. By anyone's standards, the camp is first rate. Sure, some of the buildings are deteriorating, but they have outlasted the men who built them, and are older than the majority of people living today. Four of the buildings were probably used by officers or high-ranking

sergeants or may have been used to store supplies; one building showed evidence of being used for a shower and probably a latrine, which was surprising. Three long buildings were probably there for the enlisted guys; if viewed from the top, these buildings were in the shape of a square “U”. I would guess the middle of the three may have also been the mess hall, or to put it in language a sailor would understand (talking to you, CAPT Oozic), it might have been the galley. Near the entrance is where the stables were located; the closest building is made of wood and has a chimney inside that was for the forge and bellows of the blacksmith shop.



Camp Holland as seen from Vieja Pass



Probably Officer's Quarters



Enlisted men's quarters

I told Jon that I imagined when he was age 20, had he been in the army, he would have enjoyed being stationed here because of his interest in rocks and geology, and he surprised me with his answer: “Only if there was a rancher’s daughter nearby”! After four years of army life, and a few years in the Navy Reserves, I never thought that I would want to stay in another military installation again, but now, I think I would enjoy staying at Camp Holland for a while. Jon told me he had slept in one of the buildings one night, and also had seen a rattlesnake or two the next morning near one of the other buildings. Veterinarian

Dr. Harry Miller, whom I will write more about later, told me that a person is much more likely to be struck by lightning than be bitten by a rattlesnake, and the chances of the lightning strike are very minuscule. Even with that knowledge, and knowing that snakes are just as afraid of people as we are of them, I have to admit that staying here still might give me cause to be nervous. But given the chance, I would go for it.



Left: Inside the Blacksmith shop – I think this is where the forge and bellows were located.

Upper: The stone stables. Blacksmith shop is left of the stables.

When we stopped back at the Clay Miller ranch house, I told both sons that it must have been fun growing up there and playing cowboys and Indians at Camp Holland. Grinning, they readily agreed. Inside Mr. and Mrs. Miller's house is a large photo of Capote Creek Falls, which have a good drop. Apparently, the falls are located on some private property owned by someone else, and I guess the owner is very selective whom he allows to see the falls. Perhaps someday in my lifetime I will be able to see them. I mentioned to Mr. Miller about how difficult it must have been to install some of the barbed wire fences. He said that he did not set the fence posts, nor did he string the barbed wire, but he did lead the mules that took the material up to the rimrock. I then asked if there were any books written on the history of it, and they showed me Bosque Bonito, which Jon bought in Marfa a couple of days later. When I thumbed through the book, I only saw limited references, but I must buy the book and thoroughly read it. The Millers showed Jon a couple file folders or brown envelopes containing historical documents, and Mr. Miller said that he has given some stuff to the archives at Sul Ross. When Jon and I visited Glenn Justice the next day, Jon suggested that Glenn write a book on the camp, but right now he has other projects going. Glenn is an authority and author on this area of West Texas. One of the books that he wrote is Little Known History of the Texas Big Bend, which I bought directly from him. He makes reference to Camp Holland in this book. In the chapter titled "Revolution on the Rio Grande", he mentions the camp:

"A large outpost sat on the Candelaria rimrock near Vieja Pass at Holland's ranch. This camp, located several miles from the Rio Grande, was used as a stopover point between Marfa and the river for mule trains supplying the border outposts. In July 1919, Troop B of the Fifth Cavalry, Company H of the 37th Infantry, and three army pack trains occupied the Camp Holland".¹

In the chapter called, "The Brite Ranch Raid" that occurred on Christmas Day, 1917, Glenn wrote:

"An automobile posse, led by Sheriff Ira Cline, joined about a hundred cavalymen in a wild ride to Brite. Slower, mounted cavalry followed behind. Word spread to the border outpost of the 8th Cavalry at the Candelaria, Holland and Evetts Ranch camps by telephone. Mounted troops from these border outposts rushed to intercept the raiders before they made good their escape to Mexico".²

To me, what seems like a good retirement plan, whenever that happens in ten years or so, is to go live at Camp Holland (if the Miller family agreed) while I attend a semester at Sul Ross taking Big Bend geology courses and McDonald Observatory astronomy classes, and during the same time, write a detailed history of the place. This place really fascinates me. Perhaps if I wrote a history I could include little known or different, but accurate data. And I have never attempted to do such a thing! I would like to read old letters from the men stationed there. Having read Glenn's book as soon as I arrived home, and seeing his attention to detail and historical accuracy, I doubt that my attempts to write a history of Camp Holland would come any where close to being as good as the books that he writes. I don't know to what extent that the camp's history has been recorded but I did see one reference on the Internet after I came home:

Recommended citation: "CAMP HOLLAND." The Handbook of Texas Online.
<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/CC/qbc13.html>

Julia Cauble Smith wrote:

"CAMP HOLLAND. Camp Holland, twelve miles west of Valentine at Vieja Pass in Presidio County, was constructed in 1918 after the Brite Ranch and Neville Ranch raids by Mexican bandits. Vieja Pass was used by Indians in prehistoric times because of its good supply of water and grass. On June 12, 1880, the pass was the scene of the last Apache attack in Presidio County; on that day four Pueblo Indian scouts and Lt. Frank H. Mills of the Twenty-fourth United States Infantry fought off twenty Apaches. Camp Holland, named for the J. R. Holland Ranch on which it was built, was a base for packtrains that supplied Col. George T. Langhorne's Eighth United States Cavalry as it patrolled the Mexican border. On September 9, 1919, Troop B of the Second Squadron was assigned to Camp Holland. The buildings of the camp were made of stone and wood and cost over \$16,000 to construct. Although soldiers seldom lived there, Camp Holland had two barracks that could house up to 400 men, four officers' houses, a mess hall, and a guardhouse. The soldiers' everyday needs were met by a bakery, a corral, a blacksmith shop, and a quartermaster store. Since the area afforded a good supply of spring water, the camp had a sewer system and a shower house. By 1921 the army began phasing out border patrols in Presidio County. Camp Holland was closed and leased to civilians including Texas Rangers and customs and immigration border patrols in January 1922. It was eventually sold at auction to C. O. Finley. The deserted buildings were still standing in the late 1960s."³

Our next stop for the day was in Marfa, where the Marfa Lights Festival was being held. We parked the truck near the courthouse and wandered around the vendors, eating sausage-on-a-stick and fajitas, and drinking homemade lemonade, for half of what it would cost in Houston or Austin. This Labor Day weekend was a busy time for the area. In Alpine, a hot air balloon festival was also being held. Once we were back in Alpine, Jon decided that he wanted to go back to his motel room and write notes. Not this kid. At 7 PM it was too early for me to just hang around a motel room, so I headed to Ft. Davis and then drove on up to a place near the entrance of the McDonald Observatory. I had been at the observatory before, so it was OK with me not to star gaze. It had started raining, so since it would be a while before the stars would be visible, I headed back the 40 miles to Alpine. By the time I arrived back at the motel I was tired. I debated whether or not to drive the additional 15 miles west to see the Marfa Lights, and they won out. The lights have been observed by soldiers over 100 years ago thinking that the Indians were making signals; the Indians could tell stories of their grandfathers seeing the lights. To me, when oncoming vehicles didn't blind you with their headlights, the Marfa lights looked like somebody else turning headlights on and off many miles away to the southwest. They appear randomly, and at great distances apart, and do not stay on for long, but reappear a few minutes later. No one seems to know the origination of the lights, but I guess they have been around for centuries. I doubt if two hundred years ago the Indians were turning the headlights on and off their jeeps so the ranchers around Marfa could have a festival. Although I expected something like the northern lights, and was disappointed that I didn't see something similar, I am glad now that I know what the Marfa Lights look like.

Saturday, September 4th

My room lights were on, and I stepped in the shower as Jon banged on my door to wake up. I yelled for him to wait a few minutes. Three or four times he loudly knocked on my door. I finally got through to him to leave me alone. When I came outside, he told me he thought that I was watching TV. Nobody could watch TV with the jackhammering going on at the door, and I wondered how receptive my neighbors in the next room over were to Jon pounding on the door and me yelling for him to stop! We were both irritated with each other, but it didn't last long. After another breakfast in Marfa we fueled up the truck again and drove south on Texas road FM2810; when the blacktop ended we entered Pinto Canyon and headed towards Ruidosa, located right next to the Rio Grande. We stopped often, taking photos of rocks and cactus, wandering through abandoned adobe buildings, checking for fossils in some shale formations along streambeds, and enjoying the view and the dryer climate and the smell of the morning desert air. Two or three times we saw another vehicle, not bad for 54 miles of travelling. Because of the recent rains, the area was actually quite green. I guess that's what happens when blue water mixes with yellow dirt! Once, Jon had me stop the truck to look at a snake we had passed over. He jumped out of the truck to look at it; finally I did too. Jon said that it wasn't a poisonous snake, but all I know

is that I didn't want to be too close. As I looked under my truck the snake looked at me from about four feet away and stuck out his forked tongue at me; I did not stick my tongue out at the snake. Perhaps it was three or four feet long, but it wasn't coiled, it wasn't rattling, and I didn't stick around long enough to make its acquaintance!

Our last stop before we arrived at Ruidosa was to photograph the ruins of an old adobe structure, perhaps one of the forts that dotted the Rio Grande, and the distant mountains of Mexico. Driving through the border town of Ruidosa, Jon spotted a guy wearing a wide sombrero working in front of a general store and asked me to stop. He said to the guy, "Can you tell me which way is Houston?" I thought that was a strange question, even more so when the guy gave a serious sounding answer filled with obscene descriptive adjectives about crossing the river and turning right, which I thought would eventually have taken us to Baja. Then Jon says, "How you doing, Rusty?" and they grinned at each other and shook hands. It turns out that Rusty is known for his talents as a chef, and not just for making border town tamales. I guess he attended some school in New York that taught him how to make some fancy fixin's. A few minutes later Jon and I left for Candelaria, about 12 miles west on Texas road 170.

The pavement ended in Candelaria and we stopped right at noon at a nearby nondescript place that reminded me of a feed store. Jon announced that we were at the Miller ranch, or perhaps he used some other name, but I don't remember. I thought it was part of the Clay Miller ranch, but he was talking about another Miller, Harry Miller the third. Jon couldn't open the gate and assumed that it was locked, so he said let's go up the road. As we crossed the Capote Creek several times, Jon told me that we were headed to Harry Miller the fourth's place. He has the nickname of Quarto, Spanish for four. And Harry Miller the fifth is about 13 months old. I heard Jon, but concentrated more on driving the curves on the dirt road and crossing the wide gravel creek bed and admiring the different rock formations. Besides, Jon also was telling me the history of some of the ranches and more geology lessons, so it wasn't until we drove about another ten miles out of Candelaria and arrived at Quarto's house that I was able to comprehend who Harry III, Harry IV, and Harry V really are.

Quarto and his wife Amy welcomed us into their place, the Circle Dug Ranch (www.circledugranch.com), and introduced Harry III, his friends Todd and Dr. O. B. Jackson, who is an eye surgeon, and Harry V. Then they offered us lunch. Jon and I had plenty of food with us, but Jon dearly loves Mexican food, and I think he was sort of hoping that if we timed it right, our lunch would not be peanut butter or tuna fish sandwiches. Some people may call this mooching, but having eating two of the best quesadillas that I have ever had in my life, I know I should feel guilty, but if I thought I would be offered more of the same if I arrived at lunch time, well, let's say I don't blame Jon. We might have been mooching, but thanks very much for sharing.

Dr. Miller asked me where I worked. When I told him that I worked for Lockheed Martin as a communications engineer at the space center, he asked if I knew astronaut Dr. Richard Linnehan. Although I have met several astronauts, Dr. Linnehan is one that I don't know. Harry said they knew each other because of their veterinarian professions. He told me that Dr. Linnehan had flown on the last Hubble Space Telescope repair mission (STS-109). He performed three EVAs (space walks) during this mission. What I forgot to tell Harry is that Dr. Hubble, the man for whom the telescope is named, and I shared the same grandfather about 13 generations back, during the 17th Century. Somehow, I remembered that Dr. Linnehan had flown on STS-90 and Harry confirmed this. Harry had gone to the cape to see one of Dr. Linnehan's three launches, all which had been on the space shuttle Columbia. Having personally seen ten space shuttle launches, I can relate to how exciting they are. I had with me some decals of the STS-107 mission, which was the Columbia's last flight, so I went out to my truck and brought them to my hosts.

As I sit in front of the computer machine hammering and banging out this story (September 24th), Quarto is probably on his way to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro in Africa. He travels quite a bit, and has a business interest in Mongolia relative to tourism. I think it has something to do with tourist ger camps, with each unit built similar to the nomadic homes that the Mongolians use. In fact, on my second trip to Mongolia, my group stayed for one night at the beginning and end of the trip at two separate ger camps, and it is quite possible that Quarto has business ties to either one, or both. But what interests me the most about him is that he spent some time in South and Central America, and hitchhiked from Central America to Austin, taking a month to do so. He had kept a journal but doesn't know where it is; I would like to read that story.

Our next stop this day was to the Batterson's ranch. Well, maybe that's not an accurate statement, because we stopped several times enroute to take photos of the different rock formations. Mike Batterson's place, called Rancho Viejo, is about another 10 miles past Quarto's place. There are landing strips on each ranch; when we passed the one on Mike's place the wind sock showed that the wind was blowing right down the runway; by the time we passed it again on the return trip one hour later, the wind had picked up and the windsock was perpendicular to the direction of the runway. A pilot is more prone to having an accident during a crosswind landing. I must admit though (surprise! surprise!) of thinking that I sure would like to bring my 1947 Stinson Voyager down here some day.

As we drove along, we could see the rimrock near the Clay Miller ranch that we had seen the day before. One formation off at a distance reminded me of Teapot Dome outside of Midwest, Wyoming. Interesting enough, Glenn Justice wrote of a tie between one of the Texans – a senator I believe – and the Teapot Dome Scandal that occurred around 1920. Mike Batterson welcomed us to his place, gave us some ice water, and he and Lupe, (I believe this is the ranch

caretaker's name) visited with Jon and me for a while. Roughly a half-mile beyond the ranch house is a steep canyon that would be fun to explore. Capote Creek flows through this canyon. Mike told me that his mother has a house in San Leon, which is near Bacliff. When Jon told him that I worked at the space center, he asked, "Do you think men really went to the moon, or is it a big hoax?" It took me a minute to realize that he was just trying to see what my reaction would be to such a question, and I sort of fell for it. Mike seems to be an easy-going guy, and I enjoyed being around him.



Rancho Viejo, Mike Batterson's ranch



"Teapot" Rock. I don't know the actual name.

We didn't stay too long, and then we visited Glenn Justice for an even less amount of time at his trailer near Walker Creek, east of Rancho Viejo. His home

is in Odessa, but he goes to the trailer to have peace and quiet to write his books. By the time we arrived, the wind had picked up considerably and I was quite concerned about the rain clouds beginning to form; shortly afterwards raindrops the size of quarters began to splatter. Glenn warned us to be careful, for he knew we had to cross over Walker Creek and Capote Creek about a half a dozen times on our way out. Boulders the size of Volkswagens in the creek bed tell their own stories of the high energy flash floods that can appear with little or no warning. By the time we drove by Quarto's place the eminent threat of rain had diminished.

Around 5 PM we were at the gate of the ranch at Candelaria. As Jon stepped out of the truck to unlock the gate a young Mexican man opened it. Immediately Jon took his gear to some room, but I held back. Harry the Third met us, as did his friend Martin. Todd and the other man from Quarto's ranch were there as well. Martin had driven truck years earlier for the oil industry; I don't know much about Todd, and the other man is an eye surgeon. Although I didn't have any beer, they invited me to join them around an outside table. I overheard the surgeon say that he is 58, which is where I am in life. These men are friends from the Midland, Texas area, and Harry III later told me that they had known each other since grade school. Fifty-year old friendships pretty much says it all. I don't know for sure, but I think they are probably friends with President Bush.

I wandered back to where I had parked the truck and talked to the young man who had opened the gate. He and his sister and younger brother talked to me in English and told me that they lived in San Antonio. They were talking about the small border town across the river from Candelaria. I mistakenly thought they lived in the town with over a million people in south central Texas. Their father works at the Candelaria ranch. He has one of the best thick jet-black bushy mustaches that I have ever seen. I don't know why that tidbit is important enough to put in this story, but I do know that if I reread this story twenty years from now I will remember the man simply by reading about his mustache. I have also heard stories about his wife's good cooking, and hopefully have to go back sometime to verify them.

While I was in the yard, another Mexican man opened the gate and wanted Harry III to look at his dog. Strapped to his boots were well-worn spurs – the newness had long since faded away and the dry leather had cracked and the pointed ends of the spurs had rounded somewhat with time. He wasn't wearing them for my benefit. Each day when he put his boots on he probably thinks less of the action than a guy that daily chooses a tie, oblivious to the fact that the tie is gradually choking off the oxygen to his brain. If you don't believe me, think of all the people in Congress and business and bankers and lawyers that make decisions that are often just plain dumb. They wear ties, they make decisions or laws that affect us all, and often, the older they are, the dumber the decisions. This oxygen depredation is a gradual thing, something that happens after many years of men wearing the stupid things.

I went back to the beer-drinking table. Dr. Jackson was cooking steaks on the bar-b-que; I started eating some homemade salsa and chips and he walked by me and grinned as he said, "Watch out, that stuff will burn your shorts!" And he was right. But boy, did it ever taste good. And I ate some more of the addicting hot stuff, and sort of wished that I hadn't stopped drinking beer three years ago, and then ate more chips and let more salsa burn my throat, and several times thought about cooling that inferno with an ice cold beer. I almost had one, but didn't want the bad headache the next morning. But I sure consumed a lot of water!

We all walked inside to an ordinary looking kitchen, grabbed salad and steak and whatever else that looked good on the table. Harry III said lets go eat in the store. I followed everyone through the house until we entered this huge Carlsbad Cavern of a room where we sat on folding chairs and ate a good dinner on card tables. This room once had been Candelaria's general store. I don't know how much stuff in the room was authentic, or how much had been picked up at antique shops, but there was no doubt that this was a culture museum of West Texas. The bar and a long cabinet had been rescued from the auction block in the town of Marathon. Along the bar was a painting of a nude lady in a reclining pose; posters of Jesus and John Wayne were on the south wall – Martin said one reporter had once written that John Wayne had higher billing that Jesus. I looked back, and sure enough, the poster of John Wayne went to the ceiling, but the meeker one Jesus was at the center, which for me I thought was appropriate. There were cases for arrowheads and other local artifacts. Unfortunately, I am writing this paragraph several weeks after the trip, so I don't remember many of the items in the room. But I can't forget the four black-and-white photographs that commanded one's attention. As we ate dinner, Harry III gave me a running commentary of the history. Hanging on the east wall there was an 8 X 10 photograph or thereabouts in size, and I'm talking feet, not inches, of a group of life-size Texas Rangers, tough and mean-looking, wearing pistols, bandoleers, knives, carrying rifles in their hands or had them on their horses. These men were decorated not for show but to kill; they looked menacing as they sat on their horses waiting for the photographer to immortalize them on film in a moment of time nearly one hundred years ago. This certainly was not like recent photos of Texas Rangers grads, complete with beer bellies and gray hair and women officers. The modern day rangers may be tough but I think the old rangers were tougher.

Of the four large photographs hanging on the walls, the one I liked the best was of two men on horseback mounted above the bar. Each man had a cigarette dangling from his mouth; both had their hands on a bottle of whiskey that they were passing between them. The one in front was reaching back with his right hand and the other guy was reaching forward with his left hand. It may have been a relaxing moment for the two men when the photograph was taken, but their gear told stories of other moments in their lives that had been more tense: Harry said that except for their horses, just about everything they had with

them had come from dead Mexicans. One horse had a bandolier around his neck; both men wore bandoliers and pistols and had rifles in scabbards next to their saddles. The cowboy riding the trailing horse had chaps that looked like they came from a bobcat's hide and tied behind his saddle was the skin of another bobcat. He looked like he might have been older than the other man. Each man's name was written in white at the bottom of the photo; the letters "M. D." were printed behind the lead horseman's name. Harry's friend Martin pointed this out, laughing as he said, "Now there is my kind of doctor, one that drinks and smokes."

On the north wall there were two more photographs, not as big as the Texas Rangers but just as impressive: In the photo mounted on the right, five men stood near or leaning against an adobe building. Probably in his mid-thirties, the person leaning against the front wall on the right side of the group (looking at the photo) wore black clothes and looked like one mean and tough desperado. Harry said this man was the judge. Certainly the clothes he wore did not give that impression. A man whose left arm was missing stood on the judge's right, next to a window or a doorway. Harry had seen other photos of this guy with his arm intact. I guess that someone had shot his arm, and although I don't know any details, I would like too. I don't remember anything about the other three guys.

The left photo on this wall was of three army officers and a Mexican, all standing. I think one of the officers in the photo was Captain Leonard F. Matlack, commanding officer of Camp Kenney and Troop K of the 8th Cavalry, which was located in Candelaria from about 1916 – 1923. I think Harry III told me that the Mexican was a member of Poncho Villa's gang, On the day the photograph was taken, he was invited for dinner on the U.S. side by the American military; after dinner the Mexican crossed the river back into Mexico and the American army followed him and shot him. During this period of Southwestern history, murderous acts occurred by people on both sides of the border, and sometimes the people doing the killing wore uniforms. I am not editorializing about the right and wrong – I am just stating the facts as I understand them. I wasn't there at the time and I don't know what drove men to do what they did, or what had happened previously that was bad enough for men to seek revenge. And the country was at war with Poncho Villa at the time.

If the Reverend James Judson Kilpatrick, "The King of Candelaria" and the builder of this general store, learned that a life size photo of Captain Matlack adorned the north wall today, he would start spinning in his grave. The two men absolutely detested each other. Glenn Justice wrote quite a bit about their rivalry in his book. At one time, the general store had a machine gun mounted in a tower to protect its residents from the Poncho Villa raiders. But the army had also been called in for the same reason, and Camp Kenney was built. Harry told me that when the army abandoned the camp, all the structures were torn down. He said that the general consensus was Kilpatrick hated Matlack so much that he would not allow any building to remain from the camp in Candelaria. Glenn

Justice devoted several chapters in his book to the two men, so I not going to repeat them here.

As we ate our steak dinners, Harry went on to explain that the punitive expedition into Mexico originated from Candelaria. In August 1919, two US Army men flying a De Haviland DH-4 airplane had crash-landed in Mexico. For a week, they hiked north back to the US/Mexican border; near San Antonio, Chihuahua, they were taken captive. Their captors demanded \$15000 to release them. Cattlemen in Marfa raised the money and the army directed Matlack to deliver it. He negotiated to give the captors only half of it, gaining the release of one of the two men. Then he went back for the second guy, convinced the Mexicans to release him and told the man to jump behind him on his horse and then Matlack whispered to him to take out his second pistol. The two men then rode back safely across the border with the remaining \$7500. Following the release of both men, Captain Matlack led the punitive expedition which lasted about a week. More information may be found in Glenn's book, in the last chapter titled, "Sotol, Ransom, and the Last American Punitive Expedition Into Mexico."

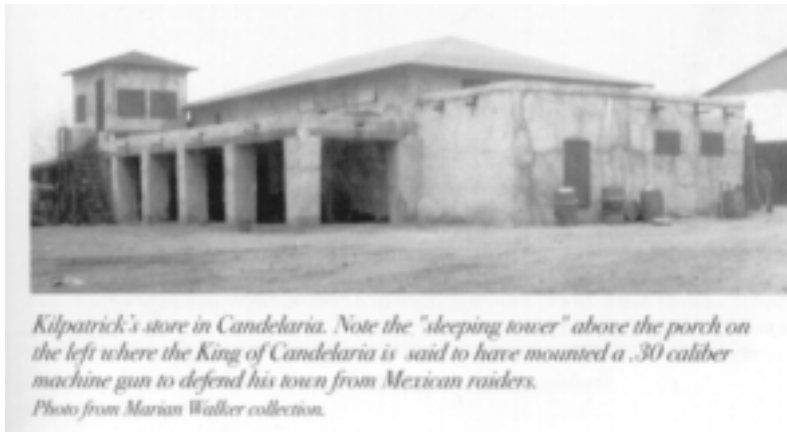
During dinner, we were all amused by the antics of Harry V, the 13-month old baby. While we were there, he didn't crawl nor walk, but had an unusual method of going where he wanted: While sitting down, he very effectively scooted across the floor by propelling his feet inward. It is really comical to watch. Martin started calling him "Scooter Miller".

Soon after dinner, Harry showed Jon and me the room that used to be the old post office of Candelaria. The first thing one saw upon entering the room was an old cavalry saddle, and a cavalry soldier's uniform from the era of the 8th Cavalry, complete with campaign medals and an authentic-looking saber. Across from the doorway several black and white photos hung on the wall; Harry pointed towards one in which a Mexican man was facing a firing squad - probably, the man was dead within seconds of the shooting of the photograph. Who knows, maybe the flash or shutter click of the camera was the signal for the firing squad? Several other photos adorned another wall. I recognized the one of the whiskey-drinking doctor. In one of the photos, General Pershing and Lieutenant George Patton were leading cavalry soldiers crossing the Rio Grande. I had never considered that Patton had once been a younger army officer. Completing the "War Room" was an autographed photo of General Tommy Franks, leader of the troops in Iraq. Harry told me that they had been classmates in Midland.

Once the paper plates were thrown out, everybody sat around the store drinking milk. Say what? Yeah, right! I think I was the only one that didn't participate, except for Scooter Miller, and he soon went to bed. Harry brought out cigars that even smelled good to a non-smoker like me. One of Harry's friends named Ed and his wife had returned after being in the field while we ate dinner. He had a pistol strapped to his right side; given the setting, it just seemed natural - it certainly didn't bother this kid from Wyoming. Ed told me that football had

been his career for over thirty years. Most of those years were spent as a coach, but two of them had been spent with Tom Landry as his coach, with the Dallas Cowboys many years ago. I told him that in 1988 I had taken a Dallas Cowboys decal with me to the South Pole. Shortly afterwards, Harry and Quarto asked me some questions about my time in Antarctica. Todd and the Doc looked at high school yearbooks. Amy beat the socks off Quarto at ping-pong. And a little more milk was consumed!

About 11 PM or midnight, everyone started going their separate ways. Harry and I talked a while, and then I went to my room, which was in the corner of the adobe building. The room had a musty smell; at the bottom of the walls some plaster had come off and the straw that the hardworking laborers had placed close to a hundred years ago still had a golden hue. That night I slept well. My room was located inside the right corner of the store shown in the photograph that Glenn Justice inserted in his book. 4



This photo was published in Glenn Justice's book

Sunday, September 5th

Jon came knocking on my door at 7 AM. Everyone else had already left. I helped the Mexican man with the big black mustache pick up the mess in the store. Soon, Jon and I were passing through Ruidosa and saw Rusty riding his bike with a couple of dogs trailing. Four javelins wanted to cross the road as Jon and I talked with Rusty. During the conversation, Rusty said he would cook for the Explorer's Club outing in April, "Just bring a truck load of food and truck load of money!"

We then drove the forty miles to Presidio, stopping to look at an abandoned adobe house. Once again, my taste buds caught fire as we ate breakfast in a Mexican restaurant. From Presidio, we wandered up to Shafter, where there are remains of an old silver mining operation. Nearby is the town's cemetery, which is picturesque itself. About seven miles north of Shafter the Cibolo Creek Ranch sprawls out. Across the highway from the ranch entrance were three or four camels, the first I have even seen in Texas. A small head of

buffalo were near the entrance. What used to be a working cattle ranch is now a working cattle ranch, complete with private jet strip, a golf course, and rooms that go for \$450 to \$650 a night. Not a month, but a night. Jon and I managed to go in, only because the electric gate opened by an exiting ranch hand was slower than my truck. They were having a private party, and had we not snuck in, we would not have had the chance to look around. Without any change of expression or tone of his voice, Jon asked the lady, "Are the rooms still \$75 a night?" That's when the slightly flustered lady mentioned the \$450 price. Grinning, Jon said, "I know that!" Someday I would like to land the Stinson there, but I would have a hard time justifying that kind of money for a place to stay. I am much more comfortable in an adobe general store.



Church as seen from ruins of Shafter's old Silver processing place



Shafter's cemetery

Just before we drove into Marfa, we stopped at the Border Patrol checkpoint. Two agents looked at Jon and me, in the back of my truck, and the one on my side asked where we going to spend the night. I said, "Either in Ft. Stockton or Ozona." And he waved us on. We stopped in Marfa at a bookstore for a few minutes, and then hit the road again. When I was thinking that we could probably go to Austin, Jon said the same thing. I had planned on dropping him off and heading on back home, but he and Judy convinced me to spend the night at their house. It was the right thing to do, because by 9 PM I was tired. I slept in the basement, where there were huge impressive posters like the cover of his book. He has a right to be proud of that book.

Indians, Mexicans, Texans, and a few million more people have benefited from the water that flows into the Rio Grande out near where Clay Miller and his family live, and Mike Batterson and Glenn Justice and Quarto Miller and Harry Miller all have property. Thank you all for allowing me to see it. Maybe someday I will have some place of my own in that part of Texas. I realize that I am in my natural element when I am in land that is west of the Pecos. What am I doing living around Houston? Thank you Jon, for taking me there. Thank you God, for giving me the opportunity to see and enjoy West Texas again.

After I left the Way West Texas in September and came back to the Houston area, I sent \$33 to the *Alpine Avalanche* newspaper for a year's

subscription to keep up with the local events. I love being in the mountains of Wyoming and Alaska, and the open spaces of the Southwestern deserts, but the ruggedness of the land and the characters living in West Texas made me feel like this is the part of the state where I am the most comfortable. Although I was a visitor, the few days I spent in West Texas made me feel more like a Texan for the first time than all the years put together that I have lived in the big city Houston area.

So, you may ask, "What does West Texas have anything to do with Steinway Pianos?" Well, be patient, my friend, and I will weave it into the story. What a strange comment coming from a man who hardly has any patience at all!

One of the advantages of reading small local newspapers is that often there are great feature stories of individual people and their accomplishments. Such was the case on the September 30, 2004 edition of the *Avalanche*. Nancy Blanton, the Sul Ross State University News Writer wrote an article titled "*Sul Ross' octogenarian student continues education in and out of class*". Quoting from the article, Ms. Blanton wrote:

"[Painter, pianist, parent, and perhaps one day psychologist, Sul Ross State University graduate student, Ed Hennessy, Alpine, has accomplished much in his 80 years and intends to accomplish more.

Hennessy, who turned 80 Sept. 15, is the university's oldest attending student. He is enrolled in two master's degree programs, psychology and education, and plans to graduate in 2005. From there, he's thinking about pursuing a doctorate."

"Eighty years old is a milestone in life," he said. "If you make it to 80, you could die the next day and had a full life. Each day beyond that is more than expected."

... But a long life can be measured in more than years. Born in Michigan City, Indiana, when people drove "flivvers," Hennessy's work, family, sense of wonder and curiosity about life has taken him from Cape Kennedy missile programs, to the Rocky Mountains, the shores of California and to the snows of Kilimanjaro in his 70s.

Educated as an electrical engineer after World War II, Hennessy had the fortune to observe historical development of computer technology. Electrical engineering evolved in the early years of computers into a career in systems engineering. During the 1950s and '60s he defined himself as a "jack-of-all-trades" in designing computer systems.

"The first computer I worked with was an IBM 602 with switch relays at the University of Michigan," he said. "From there they updated to a 604, a big advance. That was a vacuum tube computer! Solid state transistors came in the '60s and from there ... I remember when 10 megabytes was a lot of memory."

... Hennessy kept several of his original paintings, but was not able to keep his Steinway concert grand piano (but his granddaughter is doing quite well with it.) One of his favorite paintings is a self-portrait where he plays the concert grand with a ghost of Chopin listening over his shoulder. His favorite pieces are the Chopin Preludes.

... Hennessy does not pontificate. Rather than sitting back and settling down with him memories and dispensing his advice and opinions, he is focused on the future. He imparts his wisdom and reflections only when asked:

"Girls are harder to raise than boys. Vacations should be taken as a family," he said. "One of the challenges and frustrations of my working life were the limitations of time and money. Education is not only about obtaining knowledge; it's about the people you meet along the way."

Yet, ask him about trends in higher education, or considering where he should pursue his doctorate, or his dream of bringing a carillon (a bell tower) to Sul Ross - music, art, mathematics, computers - all that brings the real light to his eyes and a smile to his face. The best wisdom that Ed Hennessy imparts about living is through his actions.]"⁵



Mr. Ed Hennessy "with a ghost of Chopin listening over his shoulder". Photo by Nancy Blanton

Part 2: Steinway Pianos

When I read the newspaper article about Ed Hennessy, I just had to show it to my friend Joe Cavazos. Although Joe is less than half the age of Mr. Hennessy, they both have similar interests. Joe is also a computer engineer (he has a master's degree in the field), works on the space program, and owns his own Model "B" Steinway piano. He told me that he recognized Chopin's ghost in Mr. Hennessy's painting right away, even before reading the article. When I read it the first time I glossed over the paragraph that mentioned Chopin's ghost.



Joe Cavazos's Steinway & Sons Model "B" piano
Photo by Joe Cavazos

Joe's mother taught him to play the piano before he was eight years old. Franz Liszt is one of Joe's favorite composers, and one of the reasons is that Liszt composed some technically very challenging pieces to play on the piano. Joe thrives on tackling difficult tasks. The harder the task, the more Joe immerses himself into it. For many years, Joe had the dream of owning his own Steinway. Finally, three or four years ago he was able to sell his Kawai piano and upgrade to the Steinway. I had encouraged him to go for it; when he bought it, he invited me to Forshey Piano Company to show it to me before it was delivered to his home. Right in the showroom, Joe casually sat down in front of his piano and played some music that to my ears was some of the best I had ever heard. The music just flowed, and his fast-moving hands never even left his arms! Not to shabby!

Now that Joe has fulfilled his dream of owning a Steinway piano, he has another dream of playing a Model "D" concert piano in the biennial Van Cliburn amateur competition. Van Cliburn played in The First International Tchaikovsky Competition held in Moscow in 1958 during the coldest days of the cold war. He beat the Russians in Russia playing music from the Russian composer

Tchaikovsky. His biography is on the web page of the Van Cliburn Foundation: www.cliburn.org . The foundation was founded after Van Cliburn won in Moscow, and since 1962 it has hosted the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition for professionals. Joe invited me to go with him to the finals of The Fourth International Piano Competition for Outstanding Amateurs™ at Fort Worth, Texas in June of this year. Quoting from their web page, "This piano competition is like no other. None of its competitors makes a living as, or aspires to become, a professional pianist. These are all amateur pianists. They have a passion for the piano. They play for the love of it." 6

"It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of musick, and praised the LORD, saying, For He is good; for His mercy endureth forever." 7

People from all over the world come to Ft. Worth, Texas to compete and/or watch as spectators. Not Paris, not London, not New York City. They go to Ft. Worth, a fact that just amazes Joe. He says, "It's just in my back yard." Ft. Worth is only a four-hour drive from Houston. When playing their music at the Ed Landreth Auditorium at Texas Christian University, the competitors are just seven miles away from the world famous Ft. Worth Stockyards. Cowboy country. While not quite as rugged as West Texas, it is still Texas, where a good number of men still wear big belt buckles and cowboy boots and hats and drive pickup trucks and have imprints of round cans of chewing tobacco in the pockets of their jeans or cowboy shirts and women compete in the barrel races at the rodeos or work on the oil drilling rigs and can shoot better than most men and teach Sunday School after drinking beer in the local country-and-western bar the night before. Perhaps this is an over-simplification and stereotyping, but the point I am making is that the Van Cliburn competition is held here, and not in some major huge Eastern or European cosmopolitan city.

But I must admit to some disappointment and surprise when I went there. Joe had told me all the competitors would be playing classical music. Nobody played any of Johnny Cash's songs, nor music from those other Highwaymen, Willie Nelson, Kris Kristofferson, or Waylen Jennings. I was hoping to see somebody like Charley Daniels accompany the piano players with a good fiddle, and perhaps hear the theme songs from "Bonanza" and "The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly". And anyone who knows me from my previous writings knows that I am somewhat cultured, so how come nobody played the "The Overture of the Lone Ranger", my most favorite piece of classical music?

Obviously, each of the six finalists in the Van Cliburn Amateur Competition had advanced further than just playing "Chopsticks" on the piano. Joe could tell the subtle differences and commented during the performances, but to me, they all sounded very good. Here is a list of the people whom I heard play that day, their professions, and the music they played during the final round of the competition (copied from the program):

- [1st] Paul Anthony Romero, Composer and Porcelain Dealer
 Schubert-Liszt *Soirée de Vienne* No. 6 (Valse-Caprice)
 Liszt *Années de pèlerinage: Vallée d'Obermann*
 Martin&Blane-Romero *The Trolley Song*
- [2nd] Averill Piers Baker, Legal Volunteer, Canada
 Schumann *Symphonic Etudes*, Op. 13
- [3rd] Ann Herlong, Homemaker
 Beethoven *Sonata in E-flat major*, Op. 31, No. 3
 Villa-Lobos *Prole do Bêbê: Bruxa*
- Victor Alexeeff, Film Composer
 Chopin *Nocturne in B-flat minor*, Op. 9, No. 1
 Rachmaninoff *Sonata No. 2 in B-flat minor*, Op 36 (1931)
- Ellen Weiss Dodson, Healthcare Marketing Director
 Schumann *Sonata in G minor*, Op. 22
 Liszt *Spanish Rhapsody*
- Marisa Naiomi Haines, Financial Trader
 Diemer *Toccatà*
 Brahms *Sonata in C major*, Op. 1

After the awards ceremony, we stopped to eat at a hamburger joint and then drove back to our cheap worn-out rooms in a tired Motel 6 that had had far too many people stay in its lifetime. Nothing high class about us, even though we speculated where some of the people in tuxes who watched the Van Cliburn ragtag group of piano players might eat and stay. Besides the activity of the competition, another topic kept creeping into our conversation as we ate our hamburgers: For over thirty miles on the road between Houston and Ft. Worth, an older woman in a van drove erratically between the left and right shoulders of the interstate, barely missing other traffic. When Joe passed her, it looked as if she had demons contorting her soul. A young girl passenger about 12 years old looked very frightened. Joe called the highway patrol after the first five miles; just before Centerville he called them back. As he was talking to them, we both saw the van go over the grass medium towards the southbound lane, and then Joe told the dispatcher they had waited too long – the woman had just rolled the van. I didn't see it but he did. Within a few seconds, we passed a waiting highway patrol officer and Joe frantically signaled the man to go after her. When I saw the van going across the medium, I said a silent prayer that God protect everyone. He did. Both of us thought about her as we watched and listened to the competition. On the return trip the next day, we stopped for some great bar-b-que in Centerville. I asked the young man at the meat counter if he knew anything about the lady. He said, that fortunately, no one was hurt at all. He had heard about the accident from the wrecker driver on the scene, who also moonlights as the town's undertaker. With those two occupations, the man must have a neat slogan on his business card, but I can't think of what it might say. I leave that as

an exercise for the reader. Let me know. I can just visualize a mortuary with a bunch of wrecked cars in its front yard, with flowers and wreaths and crosses decorating each vehicle. It is a much more unpleasant sight to imagine a bubba wrecker driver who probably also makes house calls as a plumber and then dresses up like a mortician!

On the way up to Ft. Worth, Joe often talked about the music of Franz Liszt that he wanted to play if he was ever selected to be one of Van Cliburn's 75 competitors. As we drove back to Houston, Joe again strategized what music he would play, only now he is leaning more toward Chopin because he realized that the jury doesn't necessarily require one to play the most difficult music, but that whatever piece is played, it must be played superbly.

[This is the second time I have ever gone to listen to people play the piano. When I was attending Casper College in Wyoming in 1970, I went to one of the events put on by the college choir. Georgia Gaviotis, one of the students whom I shared classes, sat down in front of a grand piano and was wearing a dress. Knowing her, that was a surprise; she always wore jeans and baggy shirts and smoked Camel cigarettes. A few months earlier she had broken her leg from falling off her horse while elk hunting. I would have never guessed that she was a concert pianist. I taped the show, and someday hope to have her music transferred to a CD. From what I remember, Georgia had composed her own music, and she did a wonderful job of playing it.]

Except when the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo is going on in February and March each year, I don't generally associate the city with Western culture. And perhaps what I am describing next still doesn't fit into that category, but it comes close. When Joe and I came back to Houston, he told me that he would like to stop and have a beer at a pub that he wanted to show me, located in the oldest part of the city. I have seen old bars before, but this one is special. Built around 1836, according to Joe, Sam Houston is reported to have drunk and even slept in the La Carafe. Probably he stumbled upstairs to sleep off his drunkenness. This place has been written about in some national publications, and I am writing about it, because it is absolutely fabulous. It is not very big, the bricks walls are definitely old, and it has a character all its own. All kinds of old paintings adorn the wall; people long since dead have left their initials carved into the long wooden bar. Upstairs is just like an art museum, and if I remember right, it has some stained glass windows. Once, I took John, my son-in-law there, and later I took my sister Karen and her husband Gene, Karoline, and my daughter Michelle there one day. Sometime I will have to show the place to Cheri, my other daughter. I told Patrick, the bartender, I wanted to show them the place. He said one needed to nurse a drink in order to savor the place. None of us drink and Michelle had to go back to work, and I don't think Karen nor Karoline were nearly as interested as I was, so we left, but at least they were able to see it for a few minutes. The day I was there with Joe I drank a couple cups of coffee and

did savor the place. Of all the places I have seen in Houston, the La Carafe is my favorite. This place is on par with the old general store in Candelaria.



Joe Cavazos (with the beer) and two Hungarian Gypsies in The La Carafe Bar. Photo submitted by Joe

A year or so after Joe bought his Steinway piano, he and our mutual friend Bob Simle flew to New York City to meet the last remaining member of the Steinway family that ran the company and to tour the Steinway & Sons factory. Mr. Henry Z. Steinway is now about 89 years old. Joe wanted to meet the man before he dies. This was Joe's first trip to New York. He psyche gravitates towards the culture and food and mass transit and the night life of metropolitan cities as much as mine wants to be in the deserts and mountains, away from most people. Leti, Joe's very supporting wife, encouraged him to buy the piano, and she encouraged him to go to New York. Even after three years, his eyes glaze over and he smiles from deep within his soul when he talks about his Steinway trip. Mr. Steinway personally gave him and Bob a tour through the factory in Queens and also the Steinway Hall on 57th Avenue. After the tour, Joe's mouth dropped open in shock when Mr. Steinway invited them to lunch.



L-R: Bob Simle, Joe Cavazos, and Mr. Henry Z. Steinway



Joe and Mr. Steinway. He had signed a book for Joe. Photos submitted and/or taken by Bob Simle.

In March of this year, I flew to New York City to go to The Explorers Club 100th anniversary dinner. Each year they have a banquet at the ballroom of the

Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, and it is always an extravalent affair. I had previously attended the Explorers Club Annual Dinner (ECAD) in 1994 and 2001; I knew with this being the 100th anniversary, it would be something I would regret if I did not go. Karoline wasn't interested in going, and although I had invited Hawks and his wife Judi to go with me, Judi decided not to go. During the day before the dinner began, Hawks and I visited the club's headquarters on East 70th St., walked a couple blocks to Central Park, and cut across the part to the American Museum of Natural History and marveled at the meteorites and totem poles and world-class gems and all that kind of stuff, and then took a taxi to Steinway Hall on 57th St. The taxi driver let us out across the street from Carnegie Hall and we walked to Steinway Hall.

As usual, I was wearing jeans and cowboy boots and my hat with all the pins on it, and Hawks just had casual clothes on, but I am sure we were better dressed than the homeless people we had seen near Times Square the previous evening. I told the receptionist at Steinway Hall that I had heard about the place and would like to see it. She called this guy over wearing a tux and a sneer. I would have liked to have kicked him in his rear! Ah, the poet in me sneaks out! With the well-practiced voice of a man who needs to feel superior to everyone (Notice, this was a Saturday and he was at work and we were just wandering around having fun) he acted like we were homeless and sardonically asked, "Do you just want to look around or do you want to BUY a Steinway piano? The bottom floor is for those people who ONLY want to look, but we can take you to the third floor if you want to BUY a Steinway piano." If I had thought of it, I would have asked him if he knew if Sears sold Baldwin pianos and where was the nearest one. I told him we wanted to look. In the lobby of the place a man was playing music by Franz Liszt on a display piano. TuxSneer forced a little more friendliness when I told him that my friend Joe Cavazos had bought a Model "B" in Texas and had been given a tour by Mr. Steinway himself in this very place.

Even for a guy like myself who doesn't know anything about music, I definitely was impressed with the exquisite elegance and craftsmanship of the many pianos on display. Go to the web site of Steinway & Sons at www.steinway.com ⁸ and look at the descriptions and photos under the "Catalog" menu. If you go to New York, or even if you live there, ignore the arrogance of TuxSneer and enjoy one of the best examples of genuine craftsmanship you will find in the world. And the best part, it is free. If I am ever homeless in New York City, I will go to the Salvation Army, buy the cheapest and best suit that I can afford, take a shower, gain entrance into Steinway Hall, and sneak around and find me a place where I can hide out and camp in luxury. During the day I might sit at one of the pianos, with my back to the wall (after all, my Western heritage has taught me to keep my back against the wall, because Wild Bill Hickock was shot in the back as he sat with his back towards the saloon door while he played poker), and play a Chopin or Liszt piece on a CD player with a good set of speakers, to make the TuxSneer guy think that I was quite the sophisticated pianist. Just hope I don't forget and play my CD of the Highwaymen!

Part 3: The Explorers Club



Emblem taken off The Explorers Club website

Hawks and I walked back to our hotel when we left Steinway Hall to change into our penguin suits for the ECAD. Hawks is a Captain in the Naval Reserves so he wore a fancy uniform, and I put on my \$39 rent-a-tux. Nothing but the best! It would have been nice to have our wives there, but they weren't, so perhaps some other time. The invitation to the dinner always says that it's a black tie affair, or you can wear native dress. Well, since I don't wear dresses, I decided to go the black tie route.

In 1904, seven well-known explorers decided to form a club dedicated to exploring the world, especially in the realm of scientific exploration. They wanted members who went on research expeditions to explore the land, the sea, air, and now, space. From those seven people, The Explorers Club has grown to a worldwide membership of over 3000 people. In the past, people such as the polar explorers Roald Amundsen, Robert Scott and Sir Ernest Shackleton, Richard Byrd, and Norman Vaughan; Sir Edmund Hillary, first to climb Mt. Everest; pilots Charles Lindbergh and Gen. Chuck Yeager; Astronaut Buzz Aldrin, and mariners Robert Ballard and Sylvia Earle have been either members or honorary members. Much more information on the club can be found on its web site, www.explorers.org 9.



Can you believe this is Matt Nelson?
Like putting silver tack on a mule!



CAPT Hawks Abbott



Roald Amundsen (L) & Robert Scott (R)



Sir Ernest Shackleton's Endeavor's crew

At this year's Centennial ECAD, before the dinner started, there was a silent auction of many items from around the world. There was also a cocktail hour, where I saw Bob Crippen, one of the first two men launched on STS-1, the first flight of the space ship Columbia on April 12, 1981, twenty years to the day after Yuri Gagarin had become the first person to go into orbit the earth. Either Anousheh Ansari or Peter Diamandis stood next to me. Whichever one it was, the man is one of the two founders of the X-Prize, which Scaled Composites just won \$10 Million for sending their SpaceShipOne into space twice within two weeks.



Admiral Richard Byrd in Antarctica



Charles Lindbergh

When the dinner started, Honorary President Jim Fowler entertained everyone with a boa constrictor, a lion, and an alligator. Honoring one hundred years of exploration to the world's highest peak, and to the lowest part of the ocean, and to the moon, and to the North and South Poles, guest speakers were Sir Edmund Hillary, member of the first team of two men to climb Mt. Everest in 1953 and who later had gone to the North and South Poles; Buzz Aldrin,

crewmember on Apollo 11, the first manned vehicle to land on the moon on July 20, 1969; Stephen Squyres, who is the project lead of the Mars Landers, *Spirit* and *Opportunity*; Don Walsh, who had dived 11,000 meters in a submersible vehicle to the deepest part of the Pacific Ocean (and all oceans) in the Mariana Trench in 1960 with Jacques Piccard, the father of Bertrand Piccard, another guest speaker that was on the first crew to travel around the world non-stop in a balloon in 1999; Sylvia Earle, one of the first women allowed to join the club, for her work as an oceanographer; Brad Washburn spoke of his work in Alaska in the '30s; and my favorite person on stage was Norman Vaughan, who was a dog sled driver for Admiral Byrd in Little America, Antarctica in 1929. Kenneth Lacovra and Coleman Burke spoke of their findings of a huge dinosaur femur in Argentina. In 1990, Robert Ballard showed a tape at the ECAD of his discovery of the Titanic.



Apollo 11 Astronaut Buzz Aldrin in 1994 (upper) and photos in the center column on the right photo are of Astronauts John Young, Bob Crippen, the crew STS-1 Columbia, and Sally Ride, the first American woman in space



I had met Norman Vaughan previously in Alaska in 1995 and wrote a story about seeing him. In the story, I wrote that I had given him a South Pole T-shirt. It so happens that I took a photo of myself wearing this same shirt and a tux when I went to the ECAD in 1994. At this year's dinner, Norman was sitting in a wheelchair, but still has the dream of returning to Antarctica on his 100th birthday in December 2005 to climb Mt. Vaughan, name for him by Admiral Byrd. I certainly won't bet against him, in spite of the wheelchair, and I really hope he makes it. So what if he dies there - he has led a full life and I think the dream of climbing that mountain again is what keeps him going. From what I understand, he appeared at the 2003 ECAD and regaled everyone by driving a dog sled across the stage. I sure do respect that man. Seeing him again was the highlight of the dinner.



Sir Edmond Hillary, and with my friend Sheryl Shapiro in Nepal. I met Sheryl in Mongolia and she sent me these photos.



Sheryl and Norman Vaughan



Norman Vaughan at ECAD, 2004



I'm wearing a tux for the first time in my life in 1994, and also the same South Pole T-shirt that I gave Norman in 1995.



Norman Vaughan at his cabin near Trapper Creek, Alaska, 1995

At this year's dinner I ran into Ed Blaine, whom I had met at the South Pole. Although I didn't see member Anne Hawthorne, I first met her the year I wintered-over at McMurdo, Antarctica. She is a famous photographer. Another person that I saw is Brian Hanson. He is one of the directors and I have known him from being in the Texas Chapter since I became a member in 1992. In fact, when I first went to the ECAD in 1994, he was receiving a big award, so the Texas members had tables at the very front. My chair was located about ten feet from the speaker's podium. This year Hawks and I sat clear in the back, having purchased our tickets the last day they were available. At the dinner I saw Catherine Nixon Cooke, also on the board of directors. She used to be in the Texas Chapter until a few years ago, when she moved to Washington, D. C. When I first met her around 1994, she was putting together an Explorers Club Flag Expedition to go to Bhutan. I had never heard of the place, but she inspired me to go there. I didn't go with her, but visited this country after I left Antarctica in 1996. In fact, it just dawned on me that I was in Bhutan exactly eight years ago today (November 12th).

Our Texas chapter has dinners three or four times a year, usually rotating between Houston, Austin, Dallas, and San Antonio. Even though it means I have to put one of those irritating ties on, I thoroughly enjoy going; the club's dinners are about the only social functions I attend. Over the years we have had guest speakers such as Dick Bass, the first man to climb each of the highest peaks on the seven continents; Jane Goodall; astronauts Dr. Jeffery Hoffman, who was on the first Hubble Telescope servicing mission, and Dr. Claude Nicollier, who was on the first and third Hubble repair missions; and Bill Steele, who explores deep caves in Mexico, and of course, Jon Kalb. It is because of the fantastic stories of

exploration and the interesting people telling them that I maintain my membership in the club.

People who know me probably wonder how I became a member, because for all the travel that I do, it really isn't of the exploring nature. I have made no scientific discoveries and haven't gone on any Explorer Club expeditions. However, it is because of my work in Antarctica that I was nominated for membership. In September of 1984, I worked with Wally Downs building a radome to cover the space shuttle's Ku-Band Communication and Radar antenna in White Sands, New Mexico, where we were setting up to test the radar mode. Wally owned Pacific Radomes, and his company manufactured radomes that were used all over the world. Later, that same year, Wally was contacted to supply two radomes for the South Pole Satellite Data Link (SPSDL). He said he would give one to the NASA crew doing the installation if he could go with them to the South Pole. He later told me that he gave a flute concert at the South Pole on Christmas day. I talked to Wally in 1986 or 1987, after I had gone to the Pole to repair the SPSDL system. The SPSDL system had two satellite tracking antennas, one at McMurdo and one at the South Pole. Landsat IV and Landsat V and Nimbus 7 were the satellites utilized for the SPSDL, although for a different mission than originally designed. It was from the analysis of the data from Nimbus 7 that the Ozone hole over the South Pole was detected. It was because of my involvement with the SPSDL that Wally nominated me for The Explorers Club. In March 1992, I became a member. Incidentally, the person who nominated Wally was his brother, Hugh Downs.

At the dinner this year, I sat next to Rick Saber, a former Naval aviator. I told him that sometimes I felt guilty for being a member of the club, because I really hadn't done any real exploring. My trips to the Ice were on C-130s that had been flying the same route for over forty years. He told me that a person could be an explorer without ever leaving his home. For instance, he could be looking in the macro world through a microscope. His statement gave me something to think about. Each of us is an explorer in our own way. I just happen to be a member of a prestigious club that recognizes high profile achievements of its members. Young children make new discoveries every day. The world is new to them and whether it be learning how to walk, or recognizing an airplane or a bird flying overhead, a flower, a dog, a truck, the concept of light and darkness, developing language skills, and even what are the boundaries of the things they may or may not touch. I see this all the time as Camyrn, my 20-month old granddaughter, expands her horizons. (She turned one year old the day after the dinner in New York City.) Teenagers go through often troubled times as they search for their own identities. Most of us seek some kind of relationship with God and try to comprehend where He fits into our world and how we fit into His. We struggle with the questions, "Who am I, and where do I fit into the universe or in the scheme of things?" We expand our relationships with family and friends, we take walks through the woods and hold our breath when we see a deer or a beautiful sunset over a snow-capped mountain, or we walk along the beach

looking for seashells, and we always want to know what's over the next hill or around the next curve. I share a little different philosophy than the club, because it dissuades world travelers and tourists from joining, unless they go on scientific expeditions or have made new discoveries. Club members often go to exotic places, document their travels with video tapes and audio tapes and drawings and photographs, become acquainted with the local people, eat the same food that the locals eat, and use the same methods of transportation like riding a yak or a camel or an elephant, just like many of the tourists who go to the same place. For me to see the Terra Cotta soldiers in China, the ruins of Machu Picchu, the Tetons in Wyoming, sharks and coral and beautiful fish in the Great Barrier Reef, or to visit a monk in Bhutan, fly an airplane around Denali or floatplanes in Washington and Idaho, eat yakitori in Japan, walk around the South Pole sign, share New Year's Eve with Mongolian Eagle hunters, ride the subways of New York, or peer over the rim of the Grand Canyon, I think I am exploring, because even though others have been there before me or have done similar things, the experiences just mentioned are mine. There is no comparison between seeing a photograph and actually standing where the photographer stood years or days before you. A magazine photograph of a steak sizzling on the grill tastes like paper and ink; you don't feel the tug and fight of a trout by looking at a fishing show on TV.

As I mentioned earlier, Hawks and I visited headquarters of The Explorers Club. This place is a museum in itself. And, as one may guess, like the store in Candelaria and the La Carafe in Houston, it is my favorite spot in New York City. I have only included a few of the many that I have taken inside the building.



Hawks Abbott aka CAPT Oozic in front of The Explorers Club building



One of the many display cases inside The Explorers Club

Several of the photos of the explorers were taken at the gallery wall on the top floor of the clubhouse. My photos don't do justice to the inside of this fine place, but I feel honored to be a member of The Explorers Club.



Hawks and Brian Hanson in front of Gallery wall of famous explorers. Brian also has his photo mounted on the wall to his left.



One of the many stained glass windows inside The Explorers Club building.

Three years ago, after I came back from the ECAD, I sent an email to my friends whom I had traveled with to Mongolia. In Mongolia, things are done a little differently. This is the email (slightly modified from the original):

Last night I arrived home after a weekend in NYC. Do you realize that in that crazy place, people use silver-colored extensions of their fingers to eat with, and have to have some kind of white circular flat thing to hold their food, and there is no skull to be found to pull the off the meat. However, there is some sign of real food. On most street corners some guy sells something that looks like horse intestine and wraps it up in some type of bread and then covers the thing with yellow stuff and red stuff that looks like blood. They drink water out of plastic bottles; you don't see anyone going to the river for it. What's even worse, they do their private chores inside the same building, sometimes in a little room next to where they sleep or eat, and they have this white thing inside that little room and fill it with enough water that a bunch of gold fish could swim around in, then they sit on top of that white thing and I can tell you that it ain't goldfish swimming around. INSIDE the HOUSE! Imagine that. And then one would think the tide was coming in the way they can swirl the ocean around that white thing just by pressing this lever thing. And everything just disappears in a big vortex. They found me strange when I told them how we do things in Mongolia. Man, you should have seen all the people, and all the fancy lights - how can they ever see the stars? Cars, trains that rumble under the streets, buses, trucks, airplanes, rich people, poor people, working people, tourist people, black people, white people, spanish people, german people, african people, japanese people, irish people, italian people, chinese people, arab people, jewish people, Christian people, moslem people, hindu people, buddhist people, short people, skinny people, some that ain't so skinny, tall ones, beards, balds, spikes, motorcycle gangs, nice people, rushed people, some not so nice, some not so rushed - all God's people; churches, flowers, trash, candy, beer, whiskey, clothes, cameras, computers, coke cola and pepsi cola and sony cola and even some places that my mother would not let me go into, and some people even said words so bad that my mother would have washed my ears out with soap, and then there are the buildings, the tall ones, the skinny ones, the outlandish ones, the old ones with bricks that were hand-made by the slaves that Moses led away, and then I walked one more block away from my hotel to discover what else I might find to test my senses and my cents among this land of many census, or more precisely, nonsense.

It is time to stop writing about West Texas, Steinway Pianos, and The Explorers Club. It has been a fun journey! But I like West Texas the best!

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