

BIL KEANE
June 28, 1999

Joan Horne and myself, Ann Townsend, interviewers for the Town of Paradise Valley Historical Committee are privileged to interview Bil Keane. Mr. Keane has been a long time resident of the Town of Paradise Valley, but is best known and loved for his cartoon, The Family Circus. Thank you, Mr. Keane, for allowing us to come and visit with you today. May we have your permission to quote you in part or all of our conversation today?

Bil Keane: Absolutely, anything you want to quote from it, if it's worthwhile quoting of course, I'm happy to do it.

Ann Townsend: Thank you very much. Tell us a little bit about yourself and what brought you to hot Arizona?

Bil Keane: Well, it was a TWA plane. I worked on the *Philadelphia Bulletin* for 15 years after I got out of the army in 1945. It was just before the end of 1958 that I had been bothered each year with allergies. I would sneeze in the summertime and mainly in the spring. Then it got in to be in the fall, then spring, summer and fall. The doctor would always prescribe at that time something that would alleviate it. At the *Bulletin* I was doing a regular comic and I was editor of their Fun Book. I had a nine to five job there and we lived in Roslyn which was outside Philadelphia and it was one hour and a half commute on the train and subway. I was selling a feature to the newspapers called Channel Chuckles, which was the little cartoon about television which I enjoyed doing. Television had started in 1954 and it was a daily laugh and a lampoon of television commercials and all that. So I decided that I could live on what I was making there, plus

I was selling magazine cartoons to the Saturday Evening Post, Colliers and Look magazine. All the magazines that have folded are the ones I did cartoons for.

Ann Townsend: Well it's not because you did cartoons for them. They didn't keep up with the times.

Bil Keane: It was a good income that I could give up my nine to five job so I could work at home. We bought a piece of property out in Buck's County, near Sellersville. It was 20 acres of meadowland. We had a house designed for there and we were getting bids on having the house built when I had the usual sneezing. I was talking to the doctor about it and he said, "You're a damn fool. If you're going to work at home and you're building a house, why don't you build your house where there is less pollen in the air that you're allergic to. And I said, "Where?" He said, "Arizona (that's the first state he mentioned), Colorado, New Mexico, some places in southern California. You ought to take a look at them before you build the house." I said, "Okay." At the *Bulletin* we had a subscription to Arizona Highways magazine that would come in each month in the Art Department. I remember seeing these gorgeous pictures of Arizona. There was one issue that was about Phoenix, Arizona. They had pictures of Central Avenue. I think at that time Westward Ho was the tallest building. It just seemed to be so pretty and nice. It quoted the U.S. Weather Department that said, "The clearest, sunniest, driest resort in America is Phoenix, Arizona." Well, that's an unbiased opinion. I came home from the doctor's that evening and said to Thel, "What would you think about moving to Arizona." She said, "It's all right with me." She's from Australia. I had gone down there in 1948, having met her during World War II. Three years after I got home, I went down and married her and brought her back to America. We had our five children back there in

Pennsylvania. She didn't really have any ties with my family. Moving out here was a little closer to home to her, moving out west. She said, "Why don't you go and take a look." I came out on a Friday night; it was a Halloween weekend. I went down to the *Arizona Republic* while I was here and talked with Orion Fifer, who was the managing editor of the paper at the time. He was running Channel Chuckles in there. That was always my thing. If I was going to live in any city, my cartoons had to be in that paper. I got a room at the Safari Hotel, which was the only hotel in Scottsdale. Thel came out on Sunday night. She stayed to take the kids around on Halloween night. We had a babysitter stay with the kids. The Republic did a feature story with a headline that said, "Syndicated Cartoonist House Hunting Here." Well you can imagine every real estate person in the area found out where we were staying and the Safari Hotel switchboard lit up like a Christmas tree. Don't do anything until I show you what we have. Everybody had the perfect house for us. Of course, they were figuring syndicated cartoonist Mr. Moneybags, they would be able to sell a nice property. All we had was \$6,000 to put down on a house. There was one real estate outfit, Klevinger Realty, that didn't contact us. Yet they were running ads all over the Sunday paper at the *Republic*. I called them and told them what we were looking for. They were taking us out and showing us the resale houses where people were living in. My requirements were that I wanted a house that wasn't so much desert because it would be too much of a change from the green hills of Pennsylvania and trees and grass. Yet, I wanted it to be close to Scottsdale where the kids could go to school. I wanted to have children around so they could have somebody to play with because at that time our youngest was nine months old. The oldest was nine years old. This real estate guy, I still remember him well, his name was Lloyd Snook.

He came out to the hotel, sat on the bed and showed us pictures of houses all in the area. Prior to him coming out, I called Reg Manning on the telephone. Reg Manning was a member of the National Cartoonist Society, of which I was a member. Reg was the editorial cartoonist on the *Republic*, a very respected editorial cartoonist throughout the Country. I asked him if we came to Phoenix, where should I look. He recommended the Scottsdale area, in the area of Camelback Mountain would probably be most comfortable. I didn't know whether south Phoenix was the place to look, west Phoenix or where. Finally, we decided that this was the area and that's the reason I went to the Safari Hotel. Lloyd Snook showed us these pictures. We told him that we wanted a house that would be in the \$25,000 range.

Ann Townsend: This was back in 1958?

Bil Keane: Yes, this was '58. He said okay. He showed us the pictures. He said if there's anything here you don't want to see, we won't take you. On the way out to see the houses that he was going show us, this one house had just been built. He said, "It's out of your range, but it's unique and it's at a neat location." He drove us out to a dirt road because all of the roads here were dirt, to Joshua Tree Lane. This house was sitting there and it had just been completed. Ross Shubak built it. He eventually built himself the round house that's up on the mountain. He had designed the house and built it. He had a price on it for \$42,500. We said, "We can't really afford it. How much would we have to put down." He said he could arrange for a second mortgage with Phoenix Title if we were interested in the house. The house itself was just nice, a very modern house and we were used to the early American style in Pennsylvania. We looked around the property and the one thing that Thel wanted was a lawn and a fence around it so the kids could

have a place to play. I needed a place to work. He had a section in the other part of the house that was built for a maid's quarters, with a bathroom next to it. He said we could fix this up as a studio. I said I need a window because they only had one little window. He said we can take out the storage cabinet on the carport and put a big picture window in there. I said, "That would be great." He said he could do that. We offered him \$40,000 on the house if we could get the second mortgage. He accepted that and said it would be fine with him. By the next day, he had arranged for the mortgage. We went back over to the Safari Hotel that night and celebrated. We thought well here we are. We're going to buy a house. We signed the papers the next day and went over to Western Floor Covering in Mesa and had them come and measure to do the carpeting because the floor was concrete. We went to Barrow's Furniture and we ordered dining room, bedroom furniture and a couple of bunk beds for the kids. A few others things that were the bare necessity. We went back home, put the house up for sale, sold the house, sold the furniture, sold the car, sold everything but the kids. We loaded them on a plane between Christmas and New Year's over the holiday and came out here in January - January 4, 1959. The kids were all excited. They were looking for Indians or whatever it is Arizona was noted for. It was just great. We settled in. I quit my job at the *Bulletin*, but the managing editor of the paper, Warren Listler (sp?), who I think was one of the best managing editors in the business, said, "Bil, you're giving up a 15-year seniority at the paper. You have hospitalization, you have five little kids. You're moving out there just to freelance and do your Channel Chuckles?" He said, "I'll give you a leave of absence for a year and if after a year, you find that it's not what you want, you're job is here and you can come back. You won't lose any of your seniority." I thought that's

great. I decided after six months here that I liked it and that I would stay. I started selling more and more cartoons to the magazines. I had a regular feature going in the Saturday Evening Post called "Unabridged Dictionary." They ran on the post scripts page every week. Most of the cartoons I was selling were about the kids and the family. So I thought if I could start another feature that would be syndicated in enough newspapers, I could supplement the income that I was getting on the freelance stuff. You're more sure of what kind of money you will have at the end of the month than freelancing because you never know what's going to sell. It's all speculation. I roughed out this idea of putting the thing in a circle and I called it, "The Family Circle." I had the daily cartoons in a circle and took it to the Syndicate, which was the Registered Tribune Syndicate in Des Moines. They were handling my Channel Chuckles. They said, "Yeah, this looks good." They took it out and sold it to 19 newspaper. It had a debut date of February 29, 1960. It started in those 19 newspapers. Now we're in well over 1,500 newspapers. It ran with the name "The Family Circle" for about six months before Family Circle magazine threatened to sue us because they said it was their title and they didn't want it to be used as the title of a newspaper cartoon. We could have fought it in court because I still think it was a public domain name. The Family Circle started in England in theaters and became known around the hearths at home as the family circle. But the easier thing to do is just to change the "le" to "us" and make it "The Family Circus" which we did. Actually, it's more indicative of the feature and what goes on in it.

Ann Townsend: The Family Circus basically began in 1958 or '59?

Bil Keane: It did in my mind. But it first appeared in the newspaper was in 1960 on February 29. We liked the area. It was what I'd originally said. It was out in the desert.

It wasn't close to any other families that had little kids, although down on Cactus Wren the Cobbs were there. There were a couple of families around that had children. We managed to survive the first summer here. It was an eye opener with the heat. But we loved it. We didn't have a pool at the time. There was a house built next door and they had a pool. They were people from New York that only used it during the winter. They said, "You're welcome to use the pool." The summer afternoons, I would walk the kids over to the pool at the Heinemann's house. Each year, we would take a vacation and drive to different places with the kids in the car. Five kids in the station wagon and we go for about six weeks. I would work ahead and get ahead on my Family Circus. Channel Chuckles I would do en route because it was sort of topical. We would stop in a city or town, wherever we were, get a motel. I would go in and draw cartoons. One day, Thel would take the kids out shopping or site sighting and I would draw cartoons, mail them in to the Syndicate and I would be done for a week. Then we would drive on to other places. We'd go up to the northwest, up to Wyoming, up into Canada and over into Vancouver, and down the coast to San Francisco. Another time we went cross country to see the mid-western states. Another time we flew to New York City, rented a car and drove down to Philadelphia.

Ann Townsend: When you got back there, you didn't miss it after you saw it?

Bil Keane: No, especially once in a while we would go back for a family christening or something, I'd walk down Market Street in Philadelphia in February with the wind blowing. Then I would remember why it was that I moved to Arizona. The Town of Paradise, of course, wasn't in existence at that time. As it came about, I was just a young

guy here and I didn't know any of the people that were locally here. They did come around with a petition for a signature, explaining what they were doing.

Ann Townsend: To incorporate?

Bil Keane: Yeah. I was really ignorant of anything that even smacked at a civil action, but they explained how they needed so many people to sign the petition in order to have the County incorporate a Town. I said, "Sure, that sounds great." Smartest thing that we ever did, I think, because now we have a real oasis and it's so close in to the Scottsdale and Phoenix area and yet we're just a quiet little Town. Having that acre zoning made it a bedroom community with no commercial properties. That was the saving factors. I remember the time they were talking about putting a restaurant at the top of Camelback Mountain.

Joan Horne: I heard something about that along the way.

Bil Keane: Yeah. It's so stupid. Well, it's not stupid, you know commercial people they figured it's a great thing on top of the camel. They were going to have one of those tramways that would go up there. You could go up and have dinner and see all around Phoenix, to the Four Peaks. That's when they decided to incorporate to protect themselves. They had some kind of a trust fund where they donated the land, which we are doing now for Mummy Mountain and I'm one of the Trustees. There are five of us that are having the people who own the land, to donate the land at the top of Mummy Mountain to preserve it. We're about two thirds way there now.

Ann Townsend: That very good.

Joan Horne: That's wonderful. It wasn't that close a couple of year's back.

Bil Keane: No. David Hann, Bob Plenge, Purd Thomas, Bennett Dorrance and me. There's five of us. These guys are all very active. Yeah, the trustees of the Mummy Mountain Preserve Trust are Bob Plenge, Bennett Dorrance, David Hann, Purdom Thomas and myself. Right now, in fact, I just sent out letters to a lot of people that are in Paradise Valley that are known people, such as Joe Garagiola, Hugh Downs and Bill Bombeck.

Ann Townsend: Hugh Downs lives in Paradise Valley now?

Bil Keane: He's not in Paradise Valley, but he's in the vicinity. He's in Scottsdale.

Ann Townsend: Oh, I didn't realize that. He's moved from Carefree.

Joan Horne: I knew that he moved, but I thought it was Scottsdale.

Bil Keane: Yeah. People like Max Hechler, Joe Miller, and people who have been here for a long while and are right in the shadow of Mummy Mountain. What I'm trying to do is I asked them for a quote about why we should preserve the top of the mountain? Why it was important to keep it in its natural state and not let it be encroached upon? I was out of town and just got back two weeks ago when they sent out the letters to a number of people. Now I'm starting to get phone calls from them. I've got Philip Curtis, the artist; he sent me a neat quote. He's not too well right now. He said, "Desert and mountain and imagery play major roles in my paintings. I have painted each day for more than 50 years in my studio on Cattletrack, with a view across a piece of open desert and on up Mummy Mountain. Please let the top of Mummy Mountain continue to draw your eye without the visual clutter of houses." You know, that type of thing from each of the people. I also asked Bill Heywood who is a good friend, and Pat McMahan. People

who are known in the Valley. Frank Cush, he comes out here and plays tennis. Anybody that could have a comment. Then we'll have a newspaper story done.

Ann Townsend: And quoting those persons?

Bil Keane: Yes, and smattering in the quotes will make it a more interesting and attract interest. I'll be doing a cartoon of some kind, or a photo will be made. Something that will make it more interesting. Then what we have to do is start calling on the people who own the properties that we're still trying to get. When they make a donation, it's a write-off for them on the taxes for the amount of area that they are donating. That's one of those things that you squeeze in addition to all of the stuff that I do because The Family Circus takes so much of my time. I base the material on a lot of the things that happened to us while our kids were growing.

Ann Townsend: Did you keep a diary then?

Bil Keane: Little slips of paper. As the kids were growing, I'd jot down anything that looked like an idea that I could use in a cartoon. For the most part, I had them there and I hardly ever had to go in to use them. Daddy's watching a football game on television, there's Sam the dog has his leash, and Jeffy's saying, "Daddy, Sam's trying to tell you something." That's the type of stuff. Daddy's standing on the scale, and Jeffy's saying, "Will you weigh my feet next, Daddy." Billy is looking at a book about Native Americans, and Billy's saying, "Those poor little Indian kids. For their allowance, all they got was wampum." These are just the gist, or a nucleus of an idea. I get so much mail from the readers. The Syndicate estimates that The Family Circus is read every day by 100 million people.

Ann Townsend: I'm one of them.

Joan Horne: And I'm one of them, too.

Bil Keane: Well good, 100 million and two. I fully believe that the cartoon does touch a lot of lives. The mail is just tremendous.

Ann Townsend: They send you ideas of what had happened in their family?

Bil Keane: They do. That's the plus side of the mail. People say here's something that you might be able to use in a cartoon. In fact, I think I just answered someone. Most of them are like, "We love your Family Circus, read it every day and always wondered where you get such clever sayings. Now I know where you got the one about a piece of cheese." I did a cartoon where Dolly is saying to Mommy while she's making a sandwich, "I'll have cheese on mine." And Jeffy's saying, "Mommy, I'll just have one chee." This lady says, "Our oldest son Michael who will be celebrating his 50th birthday on June 17 asked me for a piece of chee when he was almost about three years old. That was 47 years ago." A lot of the mail comes from the grandparents, and older people that have more time to write, I guess. Some of the things they suggest are usable. At least, if it rings a bell to me. If it's something that happened in our family, I'll draw it into a cartoon.

Ann Townsend: I just have to interrupt you and ask you how do you manage all these years to keep the beautiful innocence of the children? It's not an innocent world even for children anymore.

Bil Keane: You're right, Ann. I'm drawing what I remember of our kids when they were growing up. Of course, our family was just a typical American family. It was her (Thel's) philosophy really that has made the Family Circus. She's a warm, loving person and the kids all just reveled around her for anything. She's always willing to do things. I

get a lot of mail commenting on the fact that I show the family and show the kids saying their prayers, or show them coming out of church, or referring to God. You have granddad sitting on a cloud looking down from heaven at his grandchildren on earth. Every time I do one of those cartoons, I hear from people, mainly people who have recently experienced a death in the family and they don't know how to explain to little kids where their grandfather went or Uncle Charlie or whoever it was that died. They thank me for giving them something where the kids can understand. It's graphically done in the comic pages of things, and they appreciate it. They say, "Thank you so much for giving us this." Believe it or not, when I first started doing the cartoon in the '60s, and I would mention God in a caption like when Dolly was looking out the window in the morning and the snow is all over the ground saying, "God put topping on everything," which is an innocent child remark. I would hear from some of the very strict religious groups saying, "How dare you mention God's name in a comic, in a cartoon. You know it's almost blasphemous."

Ann Townsend: Not what she said.

Bil Keane: No. But the thing is today the pendulum has swung to where those same people write and thank you profusely for adding a little spiritualism to the comic pages.

Ann Townsend: It rounds out the family.

Bil Keane: Yeah. My explanation to anybody who ever complained is that I'm just drawing on my own family life and religion was always a part of our family. It doesn't rule the roost, but I think any child growing up today needs some kind of moral guidance and the place to get it is in the home. You can get a certain amount of it at a church or synagogue [that's support]. That's it. I was one of the first cartoonists to do that

transgress the line of hard commentary about politics or social things, to do a soft approach to family life. I did one cartoon back in 1969 showing Jeffy walking into the living room late at night in his pajamas. Mommy and Daddy are watching television and Jeffy says, "I don't feel so good. I think I need a hug." I got so much response from people that I realized that the cartoon didn't have to be funny to be enjoyed by people. There are other emotions than laughter. Emotions are shown by a tear in the eye, or a tug at the heart, or a lump in the throat. That's something that I felt a license to do a cartoon that doesn't necessarily have to be funny, just typical.

Ann Townsend: You've added a wonderful dimension to cartooning.

Bil Keane: That's it, and people identify with what's going on, which is the secret ingredient, the identity that people have with the cartoon. They recognize the same thing having happened in their homes, or is happening, or will happen next week.

Ann Townsend: That's one of the things that makes me sad, knowing that some children can't even relate. Your cartoon of The Family Circus to me is sort of a measuring stick for us to look back and see what our society has lost or at least some families aren't living like The Family Circus.

Bil Keane: That's true. It's become more as you say "a measuring stick." It's an icon that people look at. Consequently, any time that other cartoonists want to do a little lampoon, the TV shows, the script writers, that they want to have something that they consider typically a warm, loving family, American home, apple pie, motherhood, they use The Family Circus.

Ann Townsend: How do you feel about that?

Bil Keane: That's fine. To me it's flattering because of all the comics that are appearing in the newspaper, they could pick any one from Blondie to Dennis the Menace. But they always do Family Circus because it typifies what is warm and loving. I was drawing the guardian angels with the kids 20 years ago before Touched by Angel (t.v. sitcom) was ever popular. I concentrated on family values before Dan Quayle thought of it. It is to me a gratifying thing to know that what I'm doing is touching as many lives as it does and has an appeal that still gives The Family Circus the number one, number two spot in readership surveys. For a 40 year old feature (this will be 40 next year, 2000) it is a very flattering thing to know that there are that number of people reading Family Circus, because some cartoons appeal to an isolated group. The comic strip "Cathy" appeals to usually single working women because cartoons are about the workplace. The girl Cathy in the script is just like Cathy Guisewite who writes it. The comics all have an appeal. Doonsbury, people like the cynical political commentary and that's the reason they read it. Whereas Family Circus appeals to every age. Kids love it. I've over 14 million paperback books in print and most of those have been bought by kids between the ages of 14 and 17.

Ann Townsend: I know one other kid that's older than 14, my husband. He collects humor. He has Daumier, Hogarth, and the like, and he also has a huge collection of your books.

Bil Keane: That's nice. I actually like the books because to me they're a more permanent collection. The newspaper goes out with the trash or is recycled or is used in the bottom of a birdcage or whatever. The books stay on a shelf through generations. I get mail from the librarians across the country who say they can't keep my books in the

library and they're dog eared. The Fawcett people have stopped issuing new books because the price on the book is not enough to warrant booksellers to use the space on the shelf. When I first started, they were something like 40 cents. Now they're \$4.95 or something like that. That's still low when they could use the same shelf space for a book that might sell for \$9 or \$10.

Ann Townsend: That's a shame. It isn't the cost of the book; it's what is between the leaves.

Joan Horne: That should not be the measure of what to put on a shelf. It's what appeals to the audience. In fact, I'm sure a lot of people don't want to spend \$9 or \$10 on a book. This one would probably be worth it because you'd want to keep it.

Bil Keane: The other ones, you'd buy it and it's gone off the shelf at the higher price. The book dealers think about the bottom line is the reason they are in business. They were having a tough job putting it into the bookstores. Waldenbooks and B. Dalton and all those bookstores do buying for the whole chain and they know that the bottom line is going to be higher if they don't include the smaller book collection. I just had a book put out by Guidepost. This is the best book I've ever had. It's 200 cartoons that have been most requested through the years by readers.

Ann Townsend: I just bought that one for my husband for Father's Day at King's House Book Store.

Joan Horne: Where's that?

Bil Keane: At King's House. That's the only Christian bookstore in Scottsdale on Second Street.

Ann Townsend: Second Street, just east of Goldwater Boulevard, on the south side of the road. It's a religious bookstore.

Bil Keane: This book was released on October 23. The Guidepost people sent a mailing to all of their subscribers. They have about 1-1/2 million subscribers. So far, they've sold about 75,000 which is a good amount of books for a book like that. They sell it for \$17. This book is a good example of the type of thing that people remember The Family Circus for with all of the smattering of some of the religious cartoons, but not many. Mostly it's the warm family, loving, typical things that people identify with among which are the granddad cartoons.

Ann Townsend: The spirit of grandfather.

Bil Keane: Yeah. For the most part it's this type of things. You have an old abandoned one room school house and wonder whatever became of the poor little kids that had to go to school there. I drew them to show where they are today. I still get requests from some of these country schools around where they have the little one room school houses. They ask for a reprint of that cartoon. Requests come from various places. There's Jeffy saying, "Please don't let grandma be too lonely in that condo by herself and give my love to our grandfather who art in heaven." There's, "Where's Al, I have a message for him from his grandson, Jeffy. He had an errand to run and said he'd be back shortly." He's down there comforting his widow. That touches people. With 100 million people, there's always somebody who has just lost a close person.

Joan Horne: I remembered that when I read it yesterday. I read it every day that I'm home. My daughter, whom you met some years ago, will call me up and say, "Have you seen The Family Circus today?"

Bil Keane: What was her name, Joan?

Joan Horne: At that time it was Gina Horne. She moved here with her husband. When we lived on Smoke Tree, they called you to see if they could come and meet you. You were so gracious to them. You met my husband at the tennis tournament when he was security and you signed a beautiful cartoon for us because it was our anniversary that day. We have very fond memories. I was wondering about what you said about the trust and the fact how you came to be out here, whether you have any other observations about the Town? The intention of this book is going to be the 40th anniversary for the Town, which prompted the appointment of this Committee. I was wondering if there is something that you'd like to observe? We all know there's been change, inevitable. What are your observations about the Town now and then?

Bil Keane: For one thing, I think the Town Council is very, very important because they're the ones that make the decisions for all of us. What I don't like to see among the Council is any dissension, which you're bound to have if individuals who have their own opinion and they fight for what they think. I think they need to back off and level their thinking as to what is best for the Town itself [in the long run too], and everybody in the Town not just their situation or what they're particularly interested in. I think there is a certain selfishness that enters into any political career where they have their own agendas which you can't blame them for because they put a lot of time in there. It's just a contribution to the community. In the *Independent* newspaper that we have delivered gives a good overall view of what's going on in the Town, which we never had many years ago. You tried to pick up something out of which was then the *Scottsdale Progress* or the *Arizona Republic* and you didn't really have any handle on what was going on.

The *Independent* does a good job. It's difficult to please everybody. They operate with almost a skeleton staff. I think communication in the Town is a necessity. We don't have a network of community activities; not that we would want to encourage that. Most people here are individualistic -- they like the place and they like to be alone. When I say alone, not entirely alone, they always have their next door neighbor. There isn't the big neighborhood community feeling that you have as we had back in Roslyn, Pennsylvania. We're a different age now. When we were back there, we were just married and having babies. People down the street were too. You all had so much in common. Here you have your own life going for you. You like to select your friends. You like to have neighbors on both sides and all around that you like and they like you. They're always there if you need a friend. But there isn't that closeness that we used to have. I don't know if that's just Paradise Valley, or whether that is in general. The way most communities are today with the advent of television, you don't have the talk over the back fence that you used to have.

Joan Horne: You don't have that. When the kids were young, I know I was a stay at home mother for many years. You met with your compatriots and their children. I think it doesn't exist because of the change in the social structure. I can't say it's good or bad. I haven't experienced some of it.

Bil Keane: That's true. There are certain things about each mode of life that are good and others that are negative. I would rather have it where you are isolated and you can call your own shots than to be thrown into a fish tank where you're forced. Then you feel you're not being neighborly if you don't participate. I don't think Paradise Valley is a place where you could really have a block party and everybody enjoys one another. For

one thing, I don't know what is the mean age of the residents. My guess is would be higher than what you would find in Scottsdale or in the area where there are schools, where people locate with little kids. There are young families with little kids but not many in this Town. When the first Mayor, I don't know if he was the first Mayor or the second, Jack Huntress.....

Joan Horne: I think he was second.

Ann Townsend: Yeah. Mr. Downey was first, he just went that first year that the Town incorporated. Then Jack Huntress took over when they had the election and was Mayor for 10 years. Mr. Downey had worked very hard beforehand and that first year.

Bil Keane: Right. They deserve a lot of credit for sticking to their guns and having the foresight to see what they wanted and maintaining it as the Town grew.

Ann Townsend: Well they were able to do it because of supportive people like you who had the same feeling that the Town should go that direction.

Bil Keane: I think that anybody who was sensible would agree to that. When you don't have a common ground, there's no goal. You're not trying to accomplish anything except little projects that come along. You're trying to get bicycle paths, or you're trying to get speed bumps, or speed limits, photo cop, and the top of the mountain. All these things are individual little projects, but there's no one big thing that you're trying to do, like downtown Phoenix is trying to build up the area so there will be a convention center, which is good. That's all for the betterment of the entire Valley if they can enforce those things. What's going on in Scottsdale now with the waterway where they're trying to figure out how they can do that. I think it's a nice idea, whether it will go through, I think it all sounds logical. The Cartoonist Society of which I was president a couple years, just

had our annual convention in San Antonio. The river walk there is such a delightful place. I can see it as a pattern. There it twists, goes around, and has trees, a lot of mature foliage and bridges. It's pretty and it's nice. The Family Circus that was in today's paper showed Mommy coming out of a collectibles shop where on the window it says "Fox's Collectable" and it has the Hummels, plates and figurines. Dolly is saying to Mommy, "What was the lady worried about?" You know these four little kids that were in the shop. I put Fox on there because of Jim and Janette Fox. I play tennis with Jim Fox and he owns a place on 5th Avenue called Fox's Collectibles. I put that on the window rather than just make up a name of a place. Same as I used the Sugar Bowl which I started because of Jack Huntress when I first did a cartoon. He asked if he could get the original. I ordered back the original and he hung it by the cashier's cage. I did another cartoon that has the Sugar Bowl in it. Through the years, I did so many of them and each time he got the original. Then he was going to redo his menu at the Sugar Bowl and he asked if he could reproduce the cartoons that I had done on the Sugar Bowl and I said, "Sure, go ahead. Just don't go to the Syndicate because they slap on a huge licensing fee." I said, "You're a friend and I'm local, go ahead and do it. Don't use it for advertising though." He did the new menu cover and now I get a letter from Boston or Seattle saying, "I was in Scottsdale the other day and I stopped in your ice cream parlor." They think I own the place now.

Ann Townsend: With the value of those cartoons, you probably do and you don't know it.

Bil Keane: If I go over there, I would rather not go because it looks like I'm looking for handouts. They won't let me spend anything if I go in with the grandchildren. Fox

was mentioned in today's cartoon. Jim Fox and Janette called me and they were almost in tears because their store is going to be closed in three days because the guy that's doing that waterworks stuff, the architect has to have a place to work. His lease ran out in Phoenix so they wanted the building that Fox had. He asked them to leave because he wanted it by July 1, which is two days from now. He has to get out. This cartoon was scheduled a month or six weeks ago or so and I had no idea. They said they owned that building for 30 years.

Joan Horne: Did they condemn it?

Bil Keane: No, he had agreed to sell it to the people that are doing the whole thing. They had told him it would be six months or something like that but now they had to liquidate their stock.

Joan Horne: The thing that disturbs me is that it has been started but there's a lot of opposition to the project. Never mind taking either side, but it seems to me premature. What happens if the vote doesn't go through? All these people are displaced.

Bil Keane: The guy that's buying the place from Jim is investing. He and his partners are investing that much money in getting these properties. This particular one the architect wants to use as the central place where he is going to design the place from.

Ann Townsend: Kind of an onsite work station.

Bil Keane: Yeah. It was just a coincidence that the cartoon appeared today. I could just as easily had it scheduled for next week and the store wouldn't be there.

Ann Townsend: May I ask you if the Town of Paradise Valley Historical Committee might use some of the cartoons that relate to Paradise Valley? You've done a few. Do we have your permission?

Bil Keane: Yes, I have. Absolutely, use any of my cartoons that you feel would be fitting.

Ann Townsend: We appreciate that, thanks.

Bil Keane: I've used the names of people here. The Asadorians who lived next door for years.

Ann Townsend: I really mean one that was more centered on the Town itself.

Bil Keane: I did one not too long ago on this Mummy Mountain Preserve.

Ann Townsend: There was one in 1987 I think that had to do with the sewer issue.

Bil Keane: The sewer issue, yeah.

Joan Horne: I was at that meeting.

Bil Keane: Then there was the 25th anniversary. I did a birthday or something that they used on the cover of the program.

Joan Horne: We're trying to continue from the 25th to the 40th. We will probably have a little repetition in the history, but basically we're trying to start from '87 and go on from there, instead of using the whole thing again.

Bil Keane: Yeah, sure. Certainly, in future years you don't want to be repeating what somebody else did.

Joan Horne: We've been building on it. We decided early on that we would try it like that and things have been going along well. But if we can include anything of yours in there, we would be thrilled.

Bil Keane: I'd be happy to have it in there. Once in a while I would use Paradise Valley on the side of a school bus, or that type of thing. I've never located the family in The Family Circus in a particular town mainly because the people who live in Kansas or

Michigan, or wherever, they like to think The Family Circus lives down the street from them.

Ann Townsend: It's more universal that way.

Bil Keane: Yeah, and also Paradise Valley never gets the three feet of snow and the fall leaves as abundantly as they do in Maine or Massachusetts. I mention Arizona a good bit. I did a whole series on the Grand Canyon. I had the family visiting the Grand Canyon. The originals of those cartoons were donated to the museum at the Grand Canyon. I don't know, I haven't been up there for a few years. They had them on display at the visitor center there.

Ann Townsend: Tell me, I'm curious, The Family Circus has been so successful and still is that, do you ever have in the back of your mind another cartoon theme that you would like to find time to do someday?

Bil Keane: Not really. I've been approached by the Syndicate and now that I'm a grandfather, would I like to do something from a grandfather's standpoint. I've built such a solid base with The Family Circus that it would be foolish to discard that. I get a lot of my ideas now from our grandchildren. We have nine of them. They think granddad is following them around lovingly and I'm out to exploit them.

Joan Horne: I have nine also.

Ann Townsend: I have five and half so far.

Bil Keane: The Family Circus will continue. Right now my son Jeff who is the model for Jeffy in the cartoon is my assistant on the feature. He's in Laguna Miguel, California, and he does all the inking. I do all the ideas for the cartoons and do the penciling, then I send them to him and he imitates my style on going over the lines. He has his own little

family circus now. He has a seven year old, a four year old and a two year old. He'll call me and say, "Dad, here's something that Olivia did." He gives me some of the ideas. He is the heir apparent to the feature. If I die or retire, he would be carrying it on. In most cases, the Syndicate owns the title rights and the copyright to the feature. When a cartoonist dies, it becomes the property of the Syndicate, at which time they hire anybody to draw the feature and it usually goes down hill.

Ann Townsend: How were you able to avoid that?

Bil Keane: When my contract was renegotiated in 1988, King Features Syndicate wanted to retain the copyright ownership. Thel did the negotiating because I'm so emotional, this is my baby. I can't really negotiate with a level head with Hearst Corporation, which is King Features Syndicate. King Features is a branch of Hearst Corporation. Thel negotiated for a full year. She stood nose to nose with the Hearst lawyers and said, "Bil is not going to sign a new contract unless he gets ownership." They said, "We've never given ownership." They still own Popeye, they own Beetle Bailey, they own Maggie and Jiggs, they Prince Valiant, they own the Katzenjammer Kids from way back. They have never, ever given ownership or the title over to the cartoonist. She said, "He's not going to sign." They said, "Well, we'll take the feature then." Legally, they could take the feature and have somebody else draw it. She said, "It's very autobiographical. He's drawing Dolly who is our daughter Gail; Jeffy who is our son Jeff; he's drawing Thel who is the Mommy in the cartoon. Billy is based on Glen when he was seven years old." They said, "Well, we can just continue to have somebody draw them." Jeff was sitting in on the negotiations. Thel and I all said that if the Syndicate ever would have anybody draw Jeff's likeness, Dolly's likeness, Mommy's

likeness, anybody's likeness in the feature, we would bring an injunction against them for invasion of privacy. The lawyers that were sitting there on the couch, packed up their stuff and went back to New York. A week later they phoned and said, "All right, we will give ownership but we want a 25-year contract." They're afraid that if you have ownership, you'll jump to another syndicate with a better arrangement for the revenue. Thel said to them, "Have any of you bothered to add 25 years on to Bil's age?" They said, "No we haven't." She said, "Well, do it." They settled for a five year contract with renewal of five years. That was in '88. We just renegotiated for '98 and I did get the ownership. Since then, almost every cartoonist in the business who is renegotiating a contract makes the point that Bil Keane got ownership. All of the syndicates are following suit.

Ann Townsend: See what you've started? Good for you.

Bil Keane: Charles Shultz who is one of my closest friends does not own Peanuts. Yet United Features has made millions and millions of dollars with the Peanuts cartoon. They won't give him ownership. He has though what he considers the important thing. Nobody else can ever draw it. When he dies, Peanuts dies. They will still have the rights to the old cartoons. They can recycle them. They can put Snoopy up on the blimp. They can do any of that stuff.

Ann Townsend: Each time that they publish that then, his family would get something so their income can come go to the family?

Bil Keane: Yeah.

Joan Horne: When you negotiated the contract, did that guarantee that Jeff would be the one to be the heir?

Bil Keane: Yes, in the most recent contract, we did name Jeff. He would have an entire say about the cartoon. If he were not alive or was not available, then anyone of the Keane family would be heir, because we have four others, all of whom are capable. One son is a writer and he could very easily handle the feature. Gail, our daughter, lives in Napa. She works for my corporation, Bil Keane Incorporated, she handles all of my mail. All the fan mail goes to the Syndicate. When people write to the newspaper, they send it to the Syndicate, the Syndicate bundles it up and sends it to her. She sorts it out and only sends to me stuff that I personally need to answer for the most part. A lot of it asks for autographs.

Ann Townsend: That's still a big job to go through all that mail.

Bil Keane: Yeah, it takes a long time just to sort it. She comes down here for about three days each month. She does all the filing. We have a whole section in the other part of the house where all the original art is stored and filed, as well as the copyrights. Now that we own the copyright, we have to send the copyright to Washington. It has to get to the copyright office in Washington before it appears in print with a fee, \$10 or \$20. She takes care of that because you have to send copies of the cartoons before they are actually published. There's a lot of other things that she does. She takes care of the books and calendars. We do a calendar every year and have since 1967. You can't buy them. They're done by the Burning Company in Iowa, which is for advertisements. Like the *Arizona Republic* for two years could buy it and put their *Arizona Republic* logo on the bottom and then sell them to their readers. It's a family project and any of them are capable of seeing, approving, and that type of thing. There are a lot of things that are involved with part of these new Islands of Adventure with Universal Studios opened up

in Orlando Florida. It's a group of islands that they have that are based on mostly cartoons and comic characters. They have one section that is called Toon Lagoon and The Family Circus is part of that. They have Blondie, Beetle Bailey and all of the favorites. The characters are all over the place. On mine, they have a drawing of a big circle and the family is standing in there. Everybody is there but Billy. A dotted line takes off from it and goes out onto the midway and the way around. A little sign says where he's gone and what he's done. He finally winds up in another area that has a marked trail. A marked trail is always with this big dog who is examining the footprints of animals. Billy is in this drawing and the dotted line goes by and the marked trail is picking a little rectangle things saying, "This trail has been left by a very familiar American creature that is very inquisitive and travels a good bit. He is learning the American way or whatever he says." Billy is walking along holding a note that Daddy had given him. Mommy at the start of the cartoon is saying, "I hope Billy can find his way back here." Daddy is saying, "He will if he reads the note I gave him." I have a big blow up of the note. Billy is in the marked trail looking at the note saying, "Billy, be sure to mark trail." Billy is saying, "Mark trail, I wonder what Daddy meant by that."

Universal Studios is a licensing thing that you're involved in. There's a lot of approval along every step of the way that has to be done. We wanted to make sure that if I was gone and Thel is gone, that if Jeff weren't there, somebody would have to be able to carry on.

Ann Townsend: It sounds like your family is a wonderful team.

Bil Keane: Yes, they are. They've all been very, very helpful. I always appreciate the fact that we're fairly in the public's eye. No matter where they live, people know them as

The Family Circus. They all have careers that we can be proud of. They are all church going people that you don't mind knowing. All it would take is for one of them to be picked up for smoking pot. The newspapers grab a hold of it and all of a sudden you have a scandal.

Ann Townsend: Good solid citizens. I think the Queen of England would be very envious of you.

Bil Keane: That's true.

Ann Townsend: Do you have any other questions, Joan?

Joan Horne: No, it's been delightful.

Ann Townsend: I want to thank you so much for giving us your time so generously.

Bil Keane: It's been a delight. It's not every day that I get to talk to two very nice ladies in my studio. I'm happy to do it, or add anything to it at any time.

Ann Townsend: Thank you. We'll take you up on that when we get to the point of focusing on it.

Bil Keane: You can use whatever I can come up with in the way of Town drawings. I don't know what copies I have. I have proofs of everything that I've done. A lot of the extra things that I do for local papers and that type of thing, I don't know what I have. I would assume at the Town Hall they probably have something.

Ann Townsend: They have some huge notebooks that go by years. I know one or two of the cartoons were cut from the papers.

Joan Horne: You mean the scrapbook?

Ann Townsend: Yes, the scrapbook.

Joan Horne: We have one of the gals who is doing a fantastic job of researching back all the information.

Ann Townsend: It has newspaper clippings. I know there's one or two in there.

Bil Keane: Yeah, any of those and the one the most recent one about Mummy Mountain where Billy is saying, "I always thought that mummies were already preserved."

Joan Horne: That isn't in the folder, is it, because I have the folder at home.

Bil Keane: Which folder is that, Joan?

Joan Horne: The one that you were looking for the names of the people. I don't know if it's in there or not.

Bil Keane: No, I don't think so.