

Jean Ekman Adams

April 17, 2018

Anne Andeen: Today is Tuesday, April 17, 2018. Maureen Strom and I are interviewing Jean Adams. Jean, may we have your permission to quote you in part or in whole from this taped interview?

Jean: Of course

Anne: Can you tell us a little bit about yourself and what brought you to Paradise Valley?

Jean: I lived in Paradise Valley for 45 years. I met my husband, George, when we were kids. Our parents were guests at Ride-n-Rock Ranch on Indian Bend Road - Dorothy Patterson's place. I was from Chicago; he was from Los Angeles. Dorothy Patterson was one of the first involved in the PVIA, which was the Paradise Valley Improvement Association. She was one of the early movers trying to make a town that would only have one house per acre zoning, even though her land, on the east side of Scottsdale Road, never ended up being included. This was in the 1950's when they were trying to stop what they could see was going to happen. They decided amongst themselves that no one was probably going to want to live right on Scottsdale Road, so they wanted to designate that as a resort corridor all the way up north. It was so different then. Fred Aldean, who had ten acres on Scottsdale Road, where Merrill Lynch is now, said if he heard a car coming down Scottsdale Road, he would go outside to find out who it was!

After we grew up and graduated from ASU, George and I got married. We moved to Paradise Valley in 1969. Our little house on Cheney Road had been built in 1954. They called it Cheney Road then, not Cheney Drive. I think it was a do-it-yourself house because it had many strange little touches. It was the home of George and Amy Bogardus, built of cement block and 2x6 redwood. I moved away four years ago and the house is gone, but it's still home. When I come into town, I feel that this is my place.

Anne: You should very much be at home here with your dad's paintings lining the walls.

Jean: Yes, these are my dad's paintings in the event room (Town Hall). My dad, Stan Ekman, was an Illustrator from the 1940's, 50's, and 60's. He did Collier's covers, as well as American Weekly and Saturday Evening Post covers, and he happened to design the American Airlines logo, the double A's and the eagle, when he was 25. He and my mother moved here to Paradise Valley from Chicago in 1972 where he began doing these big landscapes, which he exhibited for years at O'Brien's Art Emporium in Scottsdale. My parents loved it here and my mother used to say, "This IS Paradise!"

Anne: You being an artist, how did you gather the knowledge of the artist Marjorie Thomas?

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Jean: Even though I exhibited in Scottsdale galleries for 45 years and have done southwestern children's books, I was only dimly aware of Marjorie Thomas. She was an early Scottsdale artist; that's all I knew. This sounds strange, but one day while walking my dogs, I started thinking about her. Something brought her to my mind and made me curious. I started looking up information. Little did I know that I was walking my dogs right past where she lived.

Marjorie, her mother Emma, and her brother Richard came out here from Boston in 1909 because Richard had tuberculosis. They each homesteaded a quarter section (160 acres). Marjorie's section was on the NW corner of Cheney and Mockingbird. Her mother's was on the SW corner, and her brother's just west of that. When I realized where she had lived, so close to us, I remembered her house. When we were looking for a home in 1969, the realtor showed us a big old adobe house off of Mockingbird. Essentially it was one big room with a kitchen in the corner. Someone had added a bedroom and a bath. It had a big long entrance on Mockingbird - you drove under one of those entrances that you see on ranches and it said Adobe Pete. That was Pete Wagner, an early road commissioner around here who lived in her house after she did. I was a newlywed and couldn't imagine living in such a strange place. If only I had known it was hers. Years later Anne Andeen and I would ride our horses past the house, still not knowing its history.

There was an exhibit of Marjorie's work at Desert Caballeros Western Museum in Wickenburg last year. I went up mostly to see her photographs. In order to gain title to your land, a homesteader had to 'improve' it. She had snapshots of clearing her land with her brother, burning huge piles of brush. She and her brother built a little board and batten house. They dug a well, and if you can believe it, they raised watermelons and hay. They had a big white horse. She was quite a character.

In her early photographs she wore long dresses and her hair was pulled up on top of her head in a bun. She was often laughing and joking and looked to be a free spirit. In later pictures she looked more matronly. In the summer she would sometimes go back to Boston on the train to escape the heat. I believe her mother was buried back there. She was trained in the fine arts in Boston and had an upper class background.

Marjorie sold land off over the years, mostly to Merle Cheney, piece by piece, as she needed money. If you can imagine, Cheney, Mockingbird, Northern, and Invergordon - a huge gorgeous chunk of real estate, bordered her homestead.

Mr. Cheney named most of the streets around there - Hummingbird, Meadowlark, Mockingbird. I guess the folks who lived on Stallion Road didn't like their street's bird name and changed it to Stallion. I remember Mr. Cheney riding his horse around town - a big sorrel horse and he was a big man. He rode very slowly. He made money from his

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land sales but Marjorie didn't.

Marjorie Thomas lived until 1978. She died at age 92 on April 1, 1978. Her brother died long before, and she inherited his land and then her mother's too, after she passed. She and her brother are buried in Signal Buttes Cemetery in Tempe. I thought - why there? But when he died, in 1915 that was probably the closest legitimate cemetery. There was the little cemetery on McDonald, but they were from Boston, so perhaps they needed a more proper place. When she died, sixty-three years later, she was buried right next to him and you can look online (at Find a Grave) and see their brass headstone, which says 'Richard and Marjorie Thomas, early PV Homesteaders.'

Anne: Mr. Cheney and his wife ran the water company.

Jean: Yes, he and his wife Evelyn had the Mockingbird Water Company over there on the north side of Mummy Mountain. I always heard she was an old movie star. When I went over to establish our account with them in 1969, she came out to wait on me in her nightgown.

Anne: Where was your house in relation to Marjorie's house?

Jean: Our house was on Cheney, so it would have been on her mother or brother's homestead. It was originally 10 acres, then 5 acres, then 2 1/2 acres and so on. By the time we got it, it was 1 1/3 acres. I do miss the house, but I really miss the property. It was a good place.

Anne: What kind of paintings did Marjorie do?

Jean: She did oil paintings of the area - for instance, Camelback Mountain with nothing but empty land around it. The Scottsdale Historical Society has some of her paintings, plus her artist palette and chair. The City of Scottsdale had a retrospective for her in 1970. She was there. If only I had known more about her, if only I had gone! I guess I feel an affinity with her - both artists, living so close to each other, both loving horses and all animals.

She led an adventuresome life. She traveled to the Grand Canyon on horseback with Zane Grey, making paintings and sketches. She was a very competent artist. When I saw the exhibit in Wickenburg, my very favorite was a portrait of her mother. It was beautiful. Other great paintings were one of a donkey and one of a pair of workhorses on a city street. She was an independent, feisty lady, which maybe she had to be, in those days. She never married. I think she was quite opinionated. I spoke to the curator at ASU, Betsy Fahlman, who put together the exhibit, and she said as the years went on, Marjorie became a little crankier. She would look up pieces of property that

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had once been part of her homestead to see how much they were selling for. She never made a lot of money but lived a good life at a time when she said you could count the number of families in Scottsdale on just one hand.

I spoke to Paul Messinger about Marjorie too. When he was a boy and lived in the house, which is now Messinger Mortuary, he had a newspaper route. He would ride his bicycle all the way out from Indian School Road into Paradise Valley and deliver the news to her and the other few residents. He said she was quite the lady and he had a lot of respect for her. Eventually he buried her alongside her brother.

If you can remember the southwest corner of Cheney and Mockingbird, there was a small charming Adobe house there on eight acres where Foorman and Isabelle Mueller lived. That was Marjorie's mother's homestead. Of course the people who eventually bought it knocked it down and there is a huge house in its place. At some point Marjorie also moved into Scottsdale and lived just south of Indian School, east of Scottsdale Road for awhile.

Maureen: What was George's background?

Jean: George graduated from ASU in economics and was a banker. He opened The Arizona Bank at Lincoln and Scottsdale Roads as manager in 1971. The opening night featured an exhibit of Robert McCall's space paintings. George was there until he left banking and we started our own greeting card company. George was devoted to this Town. He ran for Town Council in 1976 and just missed being elected, so the Town asked him to go on the Planning and Zoning Commission. He was on that for 28 years. He loved people, he loved the Town, he loved banking, and he loved to talk. They lowered the Town flag for a week after he died in 2003; he would have been so surprised and touched. He had many notable and interesting customers from Scottsdale and Paradise Valley. Guy Stillman banked with George and wanted to store his antique guns in the vault over the summer. The bank would not accept firearms, so Guy and George rolled the guns into antique Indian rugs and stored the rugs in the vault.

Maureen: I would like to know more about your husband and the Planning Commission.

Jean: Anne's (Andeen) neighbor, Gene Mortlock, encouraged me to run for the Town Council in the 1970's. I didn't know much about it, so I went over to the little Town Hall on Malcomb Drive to get an application. Do you remember Helen Marsten? She was the Town Clerk. She was very intimidating. She was later murdered. She told me, "You are way too young. You have to be an engineer. You have to be an architect. You have to know drainage and building codes." I felt defeated, but she encouraged me to go to a Town Meeting. George did not want to go. So I went with Mr. Mortlock and Anne's uncle, Charlie Mieg, who knew more about the Town than anyone else. The meeting

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was to debate breaking the one-acre zoning for a proposed development for the land where Camelback Country Club now sits. Haze Burch was the noted attorney for the developers. The meeting was held at Kiva School because of the anticipated huge turnout. They asked for audience comments, and suddenly I became possessed and felt that I should make a comment. It was like an out of body experience, watching myself walk up to the front of the room. The developer's main argument was that their development, although on small lots, would be as lovely as Mountain Shadows. I heard myself say, "I think Mountain Shadows looks like a high class ghetto." I don't know where I got that. That comment got on the front page of The Arizona Republic the next morning. George then said, "You are not going to any more meetings." So he started going and that's how he became involved in our Town. Of course the motion to break zoning was defeated.

George adored the Planning Commission. They called it P & Z then. I kept asking him why didn't he run for the Council, but he said, "No, I like the Planning Commission because it's not political and I can serve longer. On the Council, you come in and serve, you get burned out, and then you go." He loved the commission. I think I got jealous of it sometimes because he was always over at the town hall.

Maureen: What were the big issues at that time?

Jean: I think the one issue he regretted was the walls. I don't know what could have been done, but when we moved here, everyone had a little ranch house with a horse out back for the kids - maybe a swimming pool with a little wall around that. But no perimeter walls on the property lines. As Paradise Valley became more desirable and valuable, people began building bigger and bigger houses and ended up walling them in. It was just so open and unpretentious before. Goats and Guinea hens and the occasional loose horse would wander around. I think he regretted not being able to stop the walls more than anything.

Maureen: Who was on the Planning Commission then?

Jean: Ron Clarke, Bob Plenge, Duncan Brock, Barbara Von Amon, Marvin Davis, Scott LeMarr plus Joan Lincoln - all of whom went on to be Mayors. Also Dick Mybeck, Alex Haas, John Amory, Steve Benson, Ginny Simpson, Maynard Bluemer, John Muenier, and many others who really put in hours on end for the Town. Muin Kalla was the Planning Director, Oscar Butt was Town Manager,.

Although I live out in Rio Verde now and enjoy its beauty and quiet, when I come back to Paradise Valley I think I am home. This is it. This is where I belong. This is where we raised our son and where I had my horses, mule, donkeys, dogs and cats. It's just a unique town. Because of the efforts of all these dedicated residents, it will never

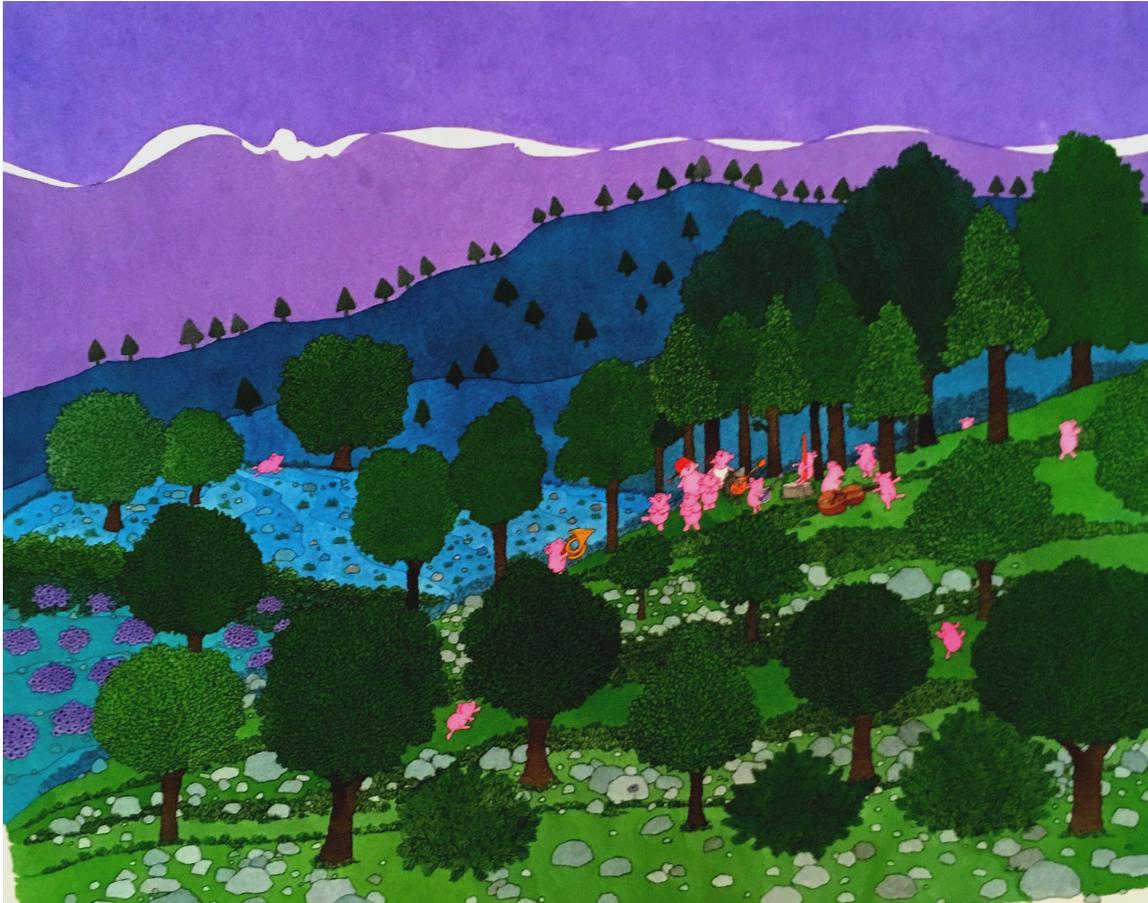
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change.

Anne: Jean, thank you very much for letting us interview you.

Jean: Thank you.



Pigs in the Wilderness by Jean Ekman Adams

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The McDowell's by Stan Ekman

Approximately Frank Lloyd Wright Blvd and Scottsdale Road before development

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Marjorie Thomas painting owned by Town resident, Phil Schneider.

Phil said that this painting is from where she homesteaded near the intersection of Mockingbird and Cheney, and shows parts of both Camelback Mountain and Mummy before the top at the Southeast end was flattened. It was a painting she kept at her home at Indian School and Scottsdale Rd. When my parents bought her property, she gave them the painting and a Model A Ford that we named Marjorie. We cut off the top of that Model A and chased jack rabbits in the undeveloped area between Mockingbird and the mountain.