

Chapter 01 – Introduction

Announcer: Artist Willard Stone was born and raised in Oktaha, Oklahoma, and was best known for his wood sculptures carved in a flowing Art Deco style. Willard had an early interest in drawing and painting, but at the age of 13, he picked up a blasting cap he found while walking home from school, and it exploded. He lost his thumb and most of two fingers on his right hand.

However, he became an accomplished sculptor and woodcarver. He took art classes at Bacone College, where he studied under Acee Blue Eagle and Woody Crumbo. Crumbo introduced Willard to Thomas Gilcrease, and in 1946 Gilcrease offered Stone an artist-in-residence position at the Gilcrease Museum in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Stone, Crumbo, and Blue Eagle became the Oklahoma artists most closely identified with Gilcrease.

After 1961, Willard opened a permanent studio in Locust Grove, Oklahoma, where he worked until his death in 1985. He was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1970. In addition to the large collection at Gilcrease Museum, his work is collected by many museums, including the Smithsonian. Stone's "Lady of Spring" was included in the 1997-98 White House art exhibition honoring Native America. The guide to the white house exhibition calls Stone "the unsung hero of Native America sculpture."

Willard's daughter Linda Stone Callery is our storyteller for this oral history interview which was recorded in the Willard Stone Museum, and you can hear it now on Voices of Oklahoma.com

Chapter 02 – 9:35 Accident

John Erling (JE): My name is John Erling, and today's date is February 8th, 2023. Linda, would you state your full name, please?

Linda Stone (LS): Linda Stone Callery.

JE: Your birthdate and your present age?

LS: August 15th, 1953. I'm 69.

JE: Does that hurt to tell that?

LS: Yes.

JE: (Laughing)

LS: (Laughing) Because in a few months, I won't be in the 60s anymore.

JE: And one day, you'll wish you were that age.

LS: That's right.

JE: Where are we recording this interview?

LS: At the Willard Stone Museum in Locust Grove, Oklahoma.

JE: Where were you born?

LS: Pryor Creek, Oklahoma.

JE: Okay. Your mother's name?

LS: Sophie Irene Koger Stone.

JE: Where was she born and grew — where did she grow up?

LS: She grew up and was born in Kingston, Arkansas.

JE: What was her personality like?

LS: Well, thankfully, she had a really good sense of humor. And Dad did too, but Mom had a really good sense of humor. She — they were both really

hard workers because they both, of course, grew up in The Depression and they were all come from very poor families. But they moved from Arkansas to Oklahoma and then settled here in Locust Grove. Mom's family did.

JE: Her family? Right. How did your father and mother meet?

LS: They met at a honky tonk in — somewhere down in Oktaha — somewhere between Oktaha and Muskogee. That's where they had a honky tonk. And Mom loved to dance and I — I can't see Dad dancing, but apparently he did.

JE: So you're going to have to tell everybody what a honky tonk is.

LS: Well, a honky tonk is — what would you call it today?

JE: It's probably a bar that had a dance floor.

LS: Yeah. Exactly. That's what it was: a bar with a dance floor. Maybe a saloon-type place?

JE: Yeah. Right, right. Many interesting characters there, I'm sure.

LS: Oh, yes.

JE: Alright, then. Your father's name?

LS: Jess Willard Stone. He was named after — there was a boxer back in that time, Dad was born in 1916, February 29th, 1916. So he was a leap baby. And his Dad loved the boxer, Jess Willard, and that's who he named him after. Dad was the baby of the family.

JE: And why did they chose calling him Willard?

LS: I don't know that. I don't know. Maybe he didn't like Jess and he changed it to Willard. I don't know; but he's always been called — all his family calls him — Willard.

JE: So then he was born in ...?

LS: Oktaha.

JE: Oktaha. And where is Oktaha?

LS: It's about 11 miles south of Muskogee.

JE: And then he was born, as you said, February 29th, 1916? And when did he die?

LS: He died March the 5th, 1985.

JE: And how old was he?

LS: 69.

JE: Before we get into his work, what was his personality like?

LS: Well, he had a really — he and Mom both had a really strong sense of humor and he just joked a lot. He did a lot of joking around. I mean, you know, he had his angry moments, which we all did I guess, but he was a strong worker — hard worker — with a great sense of humor. That's how I'd describe him.

JE: Yeah. So then how many children?

LS: They had 11.

JE: 11 children?

LS: They raised 10. And one of the — my oldest brother — died as an infant.

JE: So, of the 10, are they all living? No?

LS: No. There's 7 of us left. My oldest sister and then Jason, he was the 4th one, and my brother just under him, Danny — they've all passed.

JE: Mhmm (in agreement)

LS: So Danny, Jason, Irene, and then Grant was the one that died as an infant.

JE: Your father, then, grew up in Oktaha?

LS: Yes.

JE: He went to school ...

LS: In Oktaha.

JE: They happen to have a high school there?

LS: Yes, but he ... he quit school at 13 because he had had the accident where he lost his fingers.

JE: And tell us about that accident.

LS: He was walking home from school one day. He was walking through the field; he picked up this little, round, shiny cap — and it happened to be a dynamite cap. And he took it home and lit a match to it. You know, he was 13. A boy. Anyway, it blew off his three fingers on his right hand and he was right-hand-dominant. So he just had stubs here. And it injured his face and his stomach.

And there just happened to be a plastic surgeon in Muskogee in the emergency room that day that would come down like once a month to work with the indigent people. And the day that that happened, he was there at that hospital and he took care — he couldn't, of course, save the fingers, but he took care of the face injury and the stomach injuries.

So, anyway, he lost those 3 fingers at 13 and he quit school then because he got depressed and he thought that took away his life-long dream to become a painter. He wanted to be a painter.

JE: So that was planted in him from a young boy, then. He enjoyed — because he was painting then up until that time.

LS: Well, he would — you know, they were very poor. They were a sharecropping family. They ... His dad died when he was a year-and-a-half old from the Spanish Flu that came through in 1917, 18? His dad died from that. They were sharecropping at the time. And so he lost his dad at one-and-a-half. The sharecropper that owned the land, his mom had already paid cash to rent, you know, to pay her part of the sharecropping, and the owner decided that they could not bring in the crop and so he had two hirelings that — he wanted them to get rid of Dad's mom and family off the property because he didn't think they could bring in the crop. And she refused to, because she had already paid cash to rent the place and plus she had these kids to raise, you know? The first thing he — he sent his hirelings to harass them and tell them to move and everything and she refused. And then one night — one morning — they went out to their well to draw water and when they pulled the bucket up, there was a bottle of strychnine in the bucket. The well bucket. They thought, when they threw it in, it's break on the rocks, you know, and contaminate the well to get rid of them. You know, he's had a hand in watching over him forever. So that happened and then...

JE: So you're talking about Willard's parents?

LS: Willard's ... it was just his mom because his dad had already passed. Mom and the 6 kids.

JE: Mhmm (in agreement).

LS: There was 7 kids; the oldest one had died. But, so, Mom and 6 kids were to bring in the crop. And so, after that, they had been down clearing land one day and they all come in — it was cold and they were really tired, they lived in a little 2-bedroom sharecropper house. And, that night, everyone was so tired and cold, they just kinda laid around the stove and went to sleep. Well, that night, the hirelings for this man threw a bomb — dynamite — on the house and it landed on the room where Dad and his brothers would have been sleeping. But they did not that night. So, you know, he's been protected, because he had such a gift, you know?

And, so, then, after that, his mom married a couple of times. The first guy

she married wanted her to get rid of her kids. He had kids of his own, so he wanted her to get rid of her kids.

JE: Which was — included Willard, then.

LS: Well, he — he said she could keep Willard and the little one next to Dad. So she left — divorced him — and married again. The guy had a son Dad's age, and they did not... So they left home and went to live with his oldest sister and live there off and on until he went to back home.

JE: Willard left to live with his older sister.

LS: So he went through all that. During that time, at 13, is when he lost his fingers. So he — you can see how he was protected, looked over, all those years.

JE: Yeah. Not by humans.

LS: No, no. This is a God thing. He knew where his gift come from.

JE: Protected. That gift was protected. So he was drawing, then, from a young age?

LS: Anytime he could find any kind of paper, whether it was a paper sack from the grocery store or his mom would save up scraps of paper and get him pencils and colors wherever she could find them. And he, from little-little, was ... all he wanted to do was be like Michelangelo and Leonardo Di Vinci. That's what he ... In fact, my youngest brother? His name is Michael Di Vinci Stone. I told him, I said, "You know, you've got a lot to live up to." (Laughing).

JE: Right.

LS: But, anyway, that was Dad's heroes. And when he lost his fingers, he got really depressed because he couldn't — he thought he couldn't paint.

JE: Yup.

Chapter 03 – 13:30
Clay from Bar Ditch

Linda Stone (LS): So he took up modeling the red clay out of the ditch. He took — that's where that Lincoln Head ... was that red clay out of the ditch. And he would, to rehab his hand, and he started sculpting things then and he would put 'em on his mailbox. And he and the mailman kind of had this game going and the mailman would come by and they'd talk about his piece and the mailman would encourage him. So, from there, the mailman introduced him to Grant Foreman, who was an Oklahoma historian that lived in Muskogee. And he was a Boy Scout leader. And so he brought him out one day to meet Dad. He wanted to meet Dad. And they got him into Bacone. So that's where he was until he and Mom got married.

John Erling (JE): Let's go back. You'd talked about Abraham Lincoln and you have it right over here.

LS: Mhmm (in agreement).

JE: That was his. Tell me about that.

LS: He did that when he was 13. That was after he had lost his fingers and he was working in the clay — the red clay — you know. He would take that red clay out of the bar ditch and screen it and get all the bigger pebbles out of it to where it was just good clay. And he started that. And that was the first big piece he did and it was Abraham Lincoln and he did it from looking at Abraham Lincoln's picture on a penny.

JE: Wow...

LS: I mean, that's pretty incredible.

JE: So then he might have been 14, 15 years old, then, by that time?

LS: Yes. Probably so.

JE: That creativity had to come oozing out, didn't it?

LS: Mhmm (in agreement).

JE: He just had to do something.

LS: He had to be a sculptor. That was God's plan for him, was to be a wood sculptor — instead of a painter.

JE: And then he must of come up with certain carving tools.

LS: You know, you've got a pocket knife somewhere. I don't know. Maybe his mom bought it for him or something. Because when he went to live with his oldest sister, he had his pocket knife somewhere along the way. You know, whether he sold pop bottles or whatever he did to get the money to buy a pocket knife ... then chisels, I don't know when he started getting those. Maybe they had some around the house. I don't know that. I don't know about that.

JE: And you told me that all this great artwork we have and sculptures — all he used as a pocket knife and chisels all into his adult life?

LS: Mhmm (in agreement). Yes.

JE: No fancy tools that he could have purchased.

LS: Mmm-mm (in disagreement). No, right.

JE: ... maybe to make it easier.

LS: Mhmm (in agreement).

JE: I often wondered: How did he make it so smooth? He must have have #10 ...

LS: He had several different chisels. I remember he used a v-gauge for around the eyes and the mouth and, you know, so he'd had a lot of different chisels that he'd come up with. But he just didn't want to — the only electrical thing he used was a bandsaw to block out the piece.

JE: Mhmm (in agreement). I was gunna say sandpaper. I was gunna say...

LS: Well, sandpaper. Lots of sandpaper.

JE: Okay, so he did use that.

LS: Yes, and Mom would — he would get it to the point for sanding. And then Mom would sand it a lot for him. She'd do a lot of his sanding for him. And when she had time, which, I don't know when that was ... But she'd set up — I remember watching her sit in the chair, her chair at night — they'd be watching Bonanza or Gunsmoke or something ...

JE: She'd just be...

LS: She'd just be sanding and he'd be over — he'd bring, you know, those little electrical wire stools? You put heat spools? He'd bring one of those in and that was ... he'd work on that at night. And he'd be carving and he had shavings all over the floor and everything and Mom would be sanding. So he'd work 'til, you know, early morning hours and then he had to get up and go to work.

JE: But his mother was so supportive. That's a key to this story, too, isn't it?

LS: She was supportive, yes.

JE: And then we should mention again, Grant Foreman, but didn't he also see his work at the state fairs and Muskogee...?

LS: Yes. The state fairs. Little carvings ... Procter and Gamble had a soap carving competition, and in 1939 — I have his award up there — somehow he got word of the Procter and Gamble Company having this sculpting-from-soap contest at the '39 Chicago World's Fair. So Daddy entered that and he got 3rd place in soap sculpting.

JE: What did he sculpt?

LS: It was a greyhound. There was a man that lived down by Oktaha that raised greyhounds. They did greyhound racing down around Wainwright. It was a greyhound chasing a rabbit. And, you know, when they greyhound would get right on the rabbit, it would switch and turn and the greyhound was trying to get the rabbit. So it was a greyhound chasing a rabbit. But, anyway, he won 3rd place at the World's Fair that year.

JE: 1939.

LS: Yeah. Isn't that crazy?

JE: It is absolutely amazing.

Chapter 04 – 6:18

Thomas Gilcrease

John Erling (JE): Let's bring him into the art classes at Bacone College. Where is Bacone?

Linda Stone (LS): It's in Muskogee.

JE: In Muskogee. Alright. And then who are his teachers?

LS: Acee Blue Eagle and Woody Crumbo were his art instructors there at the time. And they were very encouraging to him. They told him that they couldn't really teach him a lot at that point because he pretty much already had everything going. And so they cleaned out a storage room there at the art department at Bacone and said, "Here, take this and use it for a studio and create however you want to." So that's what he did at Bacone.

JE: And we should say, Acee Blue Eagle...

LS: Yes.

JE: He was an artist, educator, dancer... and his birthname was actually Alexander C. Macintosh.

LS: Really?

JE: Right.

LS: I didn't realize he was a Macintosh.

JE: Right. And then Woody Crumbo was Potawatomi. Artist. Native American. Flute player. And we actually have his story as told by Minisa Halsey Crumbo. And, of course, he worked for Mr. Gilcrease, as did your father.

LS: Right.

JE: So, after he left Bacone, is that when he got married?

LS: He and Mom got married and they moved to Oktaha. That's where they had their first 3 babies. And then WWII started. And Dad couldn't fight in the war because he didn't have his fingers. And so they moved up here to Locust where Mom's family was and there was a powder plant in Pryor — ammunitions plant over there. So Daddy worked over there for a few years of the war.

JE: So we're talking '41, '42?

LS: Yeah. They moved up here in 1940... Well, they got married in 1940, so, they moved in here in, like, '41, I think.

JE: He actually went to work for Thomas Gilcrease in 1948. So what did he do in those years — '44, '45...?

LS: He worked for Mr. Gilcrease from '47 - '49. 3 years as an artist-in-residence. Before that, he worked at the powder plant, so he — I don't know how many years he worked at the powder plant and ammunition plant there in Pryor. But from there he went to Mr. Gilcrease.

JE: And Woody Crumbo...

LS: Was there.

JE: ... actually introduced him, didn't he? To Thomas Gilcrease.

LS: Yes.

JE: And then, so, he — did he live there, on the grounds?

LS: He ... No, he did not, because he didn't want to live in town. He wanted to live away from the big city. And he didn't want to raise his kids in a big city, so they stayed here. He stayed over there some because they didn't have a car. They didn't have a car until 1956. So, he would catch rides and work over there. Sometimes he would stay there during the week and he would come home on weekends.

JE: Minisa lived on the grounds, I believe, she talked about...

LS: Mr. Gilcrease wanted Mom and Dad to live over there — and actually to run a boy's home, is why Mr. Gilcrease wanted them to come and, you know, they already had enough children (chuckles). They just didn't want to live in the city. They'd grown up on, you know, farms and that's what they wanted. Daddy — he loved animals. He talked to all the animals. He wanted every kind of animal we could find, you know. We had all kinds of animals.

JE: Did he talk about working for Thomas Gilcrease?

LS: Not a lot that I remember because I was ... Well, I wasn't born until '53. But I'd ask him a lot of questions because I followed him around all of the time. There was a man there, Charlie Braytow, and he taught Dad how to make plaster molds. And he and Mr. Braytow did a lot of plaster work for Mr. Gilcrease. The first Gilcrease, they had tiles in the front entryway, and Dad and Mr. Braytow had made those tiles — plaster tiles — for the entrance to the museum there.

JE: Okay, they were...

LS: So he learned all that from Mr. Braytow at Gilcrease.

JE: Okay. I have a letter here that your father wrote to Mr. Gilcrease.

LS: Okay.

JE: And this was January 8th, 1947. "Dear Mr. Gilcrease, at last I am beginning to make a little headway, I think. I am carving on that piece of ebony wood and if I can get anything out of it worth looking at, I will have a lot more confidence in myself than I have right now."

The reason I'm reading so slow here is because I am — this was very light ink...

"Included is a drawing of an eagle dancer that I hope you will be interested in and hope to carve for you when I get more good wood for it..."

LS: Mr. Gilcrease told him that — he brought this piece of ebony which was the hardest wood in the world. He said, "If you can carve something out of this, then that'll show me that you're a wood sculptor."

So, I don't know if you've seen that piece at Gilcrease. He did a buffalo that had been killed, laying on its side. And there was an arrow — he'd carved a little arrow and he put it in the buffalo — and people kept stealing the arrow out of the buffalo, so they finally just took it out. But, anyway, that's what he carved out of that piece of ebony was a dying buffalo.

JE: So was that his audition?

LS: I guess. That's the story I was told that Mr. Gilcrease said, "If you can make something out of this wood, then you're good."

JE: Right.

LS: So I guess that's kinda what started it with him.

JE: Right. Willard had his own distinct style, didn't he?

LS: Yes he did.

JE: And it was influenced, then, by other styles.

LS: Well, yeah ... kind of an art deco, maybe? You know, style, because it's very free-flowing. Some of it's very detailed, but he liked to elongate the horses' legs or the, different things, you know. He would just stylize it like that. More like that art deco look.

Chapter 05 – 8:46

Decision Time

John Erling (JE): But then he also took on topics, contemporary topics.

Linda Stone (LS): Lot of .. he was very philosophical. Daddy had very strong opinions, you know, on his beliefs and everything and he put that in his wood. And sometimes that got him in trouble. But, you know, on the political side of it.

JE: He was interested in the nuclear warfare?

LS: Yes. Yes; he did several war pieces that belonged to Gilcrease.

JE: One called "Atomic Age?"

LS: Yes. And the "War Widows."

JE: So was it kind of his protest against war? Was he protesting?

LS: I don't know if "protesting" is the right word. He just had such deep feelings about it and the destruction that it caused. So maybe in his mind it was? I don't wanna say, "Well, it wasn't." He just had very deep thoughts about the war, about politics, and showed that in his work. You know, he did a lot of Native American art. But then he did a lot of animals. He loved animals, like I said — animals and kids.

JE: Gilcrease has many, many pieces. How many about? 50-some?

LS: No, I think it's quite a bit more than that. Last I heard — and I'm not sure exactly — but it was around 80 pieces.

JE: And — for the record, we should say — Gilcrease is not open right now because they are building a beautiful new facility and we're looking forward to that opening. I don't know when that's going to open. If it's '24, '24, or '26, and here we're in 2023.

Then after he left Gilcrease, he actually worked in Tulsa?

LS: Yes, for Earnest Wiemann. Ernest Wiemann Ironworks he designed.

JE: And what was that? Ironworks? What does that ...?

LS: Ornamental ironworks. Designed furniture. He did tables. He would carve the design and then Mr. Wiemann would make molds off of the design and do his patio furniture and, I mean ...

JE: Chairs, tables ...

LS: ... bedroom furniture, yeah.

JE: ... things like that?

LS: Bed Frames, fences, I mean they used that ornamental ironwork for all that...

JE: I could see gates, too, I would imagine, would be pretty fancy.

LS: Yes, gates. Uh-huh (in agreement). He had some specific designs that he did for Mr. Wiemann.

JE: I wonder if he thought: "I can hardly wait so I don't have to work for somebody."

LS: Yeah. (Chuckling). Like I said, they had 10 kids, so...

JE: Right.

LS: He had to work to be able to do his artwork. And, like I said, he'd catch a ride to work... Well, I don't know if you're ready for McDonald Douglas yet, but from Mr. Wiemann, he went to work for McDonald Douglas.

JE: Mhmm (in agreement)

LS: And he was a die maker at McDonald Douglas. And there was a wall by where he would stand, a concrete-block wall, and he would sketch all over that wall during his day. And when they got ready ... in fact, he's got a print called "Stone's Wall of Conception" from that — took a picture of that piece of concrete-block wall.

Anyway, when they got ready to tear down the building or whatever they did out there, they were going to give that piece of wall to us, but it didn't work out, so we didn't get it.

JE: Whatever happened to it?

LS: I have no idea.

JE: Yup.

LS: Yeah. I would love to have it, but I don't know what happened to it. So he did that. He worked for them for about 10 years and then get got sick. He got spider-bit. And he was off work for 2 weeks and then they laid him off. So it's kinda like, "Okay. It's decision time. Can I make a living off of my art?" And that's what forced him to make that decision to go art full time.

JE: In 1961?

LS: Yeah. Early 60s. I'm not exactly sure what year. I was, maybe, 8 or 9, so... And he would always bring me — when his ride would drop him off down at the road — he would save me something in his lunchbox. And one day he brought me a little horned toad that had showed up at work and he brought it home to me. I would always run to meet him when he was

walking up the hill and see what he had left for me in his lunchbox (chuckling).

JE: A horn — not a real one?

LS: Yeah, it was a real one. Somehow it came up, you know... They used to be over here in this part of the state. A lot of them.

JE: Horned toads?

LS: Uh-huh (in agreement). But now they're all pretty much west. West.

JE: So did he develop a love of animals in you, too, then?

LS: Yes. In fact, I rehab wildlife.

JE: Okay.

LS: Owls and ...

JE: Did you ever try to be an artist?

LS: He told me that, since I was a female, I couldn't sculpt.

JE: Hmm! (In amazement)

LS: ... which made me not very happy. But he told me I was supposed to paint.

JE: Did you try painting?

LS: Yeah, I do, I paint. I paint and I do glasswork — fused glass — on my paintings. Paint the canvas and then add ... But I lost all that in the fire and I don't know what I'm doing now.

JE: But you have that creative — that artistic feeling in you.

LS: I still have all these ideas in my head. I just don't know what I'm doing with them at this point.

Chapter 06 – 8:46
Opens Studio

John Erling (JE): So back, then, to when he opens a permanent studio here in Locust Grove.

Linda Stone (LS): Mhmm (in agreement).

JE: Now, is that where — the property...

LS: Yes.

JE: ... Here?

LS: This is where they wound up. They lived in town for a couple of years and then this place came up and they bought it for, like, a dollar an acre, I think, and they bought — they have 60 acres here.

JE: Alright. And there are two houses here. Did he live in one of these two houses?

LS: Okay. Well, this one here. There's one house. Behind it is one of his shop buildings. He started with a little old building right up here on the hill and then he moved — he built this one right behind the house so he could just go out the back door, up the steps, and into his shop. And that's where he worked. And then he got — outgrew that one — and he built another one, so... He's had 3 different shop buildings on this property.

JE: But he never saw this museum.

LS: Yes. He's the one that built this museum.

JE: He built this — that we are sitting in right now?

LS: In the mid '70s.

JE: Okay.

LS: Late — mid to late 70s.

JE: And all around it — it's not all that big a room — I don't know what the dimensions are.

LS: 24 x 30 I think is what it is.

JE: Alright. And his work encircles the whole place and it's extremely interesting. And those of you who are interested in his life, which everybody should be, you gotta at least come here. We'll talk about your plans for the future of this. But there he has a bust of Henry Bellmon, which became bronze in our state capitol. We talked about the Abraham Lincoln bust that he did. And I can go around and — you could, I can't — talk about everything, but I did want you to know that we're just surrounded by his beautiful work.

LS: All these little — all the small pieces — belonged to what's called "Sophie's Dog House Collection." Whenever they would get into an argument, and she wouldn't talk to him, and he couldn't stand that, so he'd go carve her a little carving and bring it in and give it to her, and he said that was to get him out of the doghouse. So all these little carvings are from Mom's doghouse collection.

JE: He'd get in trouble with his wife Sophie.

LS: Sophie, yes.

JE: So then he'd carve her a little dog...

LS: ... to get in good with her again (chuckling).

JE: (Laughing)

LS: So, yeah (chuckling).

JE: That's cute (chuckling). And so that collection is sitting over here.

LS: Yes.

JE: Did you remember watching him work?

LS: Yes, I do. Like I said, I followed him around from little-little. I was with him all the time. I don't know. I was just interested in art all my life. And so I'd follow him around but he would ... he would hold his chisel in his right hand without those fingers because he was right-handed. And he would hold the chisel like this (gesturing) in his hand and he would guide it with his left hand. And I can still see that in my head. I wrote a story called "Around the Workbench" and that kind of talks about how. But I can still just see his hands doing that.

JE: Mhmm. He overcame that disability and his first workbench is sitting right over here.

LS: Yes, yes.

JE: I've taken a picture of that and the last couple of pieces that he was actually working on when he died. You know, it's interesting that this talent will spring up in any small town. You don't have to be in a big town to have talent.

LS: Mhmm (in agreement). Right.

JE: It springs up everywhere. Because his work began to be exhibited on a regional basis and nationally as well.

LS: He started out going to little weekend art shows. I remember — my two sisters and I, we were real close in age — and he would Mom braid our hair. We always had to have our hair braided. And he would take us to these weekend art shows with him and he would show us off and, you know, we were real shy and so we just giggled and he told 'em that we couldn't speak English — that we only spoke Cherokee. And, anyway, we would do that. And he would pull his stationwagon up to his booth and open the back and set a little table out and he would carve. He did not like doing

that at all. He wasn't real comfortable around people. And he just wanted to carve. He just wanted to be here, carving. Which is one reason why he built this building because people would stop by all the time, and they wanted to visit with him, and he was trying to work, so he built this so they could see his work — Mom could show them his work — and he could still be ...

JE: In another shop...

LS: In another shop, working.

JE: ... right near here. I can probably understand that.

LS: Well, you know, I mean, it's hard to get any work done. Not that he — obviously he wanted people to see his work, but that wasn't the most important thing to him. The most important thing to him was just doing it. It was just inside him so much and he had to do it.

JE: He actually cast in ceramic and bronze?

LS: Yes. The little exodus. The Cherokee Nation owns "The Large Exodus" and he did a trilogy called "The Trail of Tears." "Uprooted" is at the Five Civilized Tribes museum in Muskogee. And then he did "The Exodus," which belongs to the Cherokee Nation and then "Transplanted," which belongs to Cherokee Nation. So those three pieces tell the story of The Trail of Tears.

JE: Mhmm (in agreement).

LS: So, anyway, people had wanted more, so he made two different — three different sizes — of "The Exodus," because he didn't ever want to make two of the same thing. He didn't want to make copies of it, because that was boring to him. But he made the little "Exodus" and someone had copied it and made a, really, really bad copy of it and it made him a little upset. And so he carved a little one and they made a mold off of it. And then Mom — he bought Mom the stuff to make ceramics with. So she and my sister would make the ceramics and then we made it into bronze. That's bronze there. That one's bronze.

JE: I have just set “The Exodus” bronze in front of me.

LS: It’s like two tear drops. And this is a teardrop and this is a teardrop.

JE: And why is it called “Exodus”?

LS: Because when they had to leave their home in Tennessee and Georgia.

JE: They’re calling that The Trail of Tears and he called it “Exodus”.

LS: Well, the trilogy was called “The Trail of Tears.” The three pieces together were “The Trail of Tears” trilogy. This is the first piece in the trilogy called “The Exodus”. It’s when they were walking — actually had to leave and come to Oklahoma. That’s what this one represents. The first one was “Uprooted” is where they were uprooted from their home and sent on the trail. And this is while they were on the trail. And then the “Transplanted” shows a mother and a baby and her planting something in the ground, and they were thanking God for giving them a new home and a good place to grow their crops and raise their families. So that’s what “Transplanted” is.

JE: Like a piece — like I’m looking at in front of me — how long did you think it would take him to carve that?

LS: He could actually do them — this size, you know — fairly quick. Now, the original of this, it’s, like, 20 inches tall.

JE: So it could take him a couple of weeks or a month?

LS: A couple of weeks, maybe, he could do one like this.

JE: Yeah.

LS: Mhmm (in agreement).

JE: Bigger ones, obviously...

LS: Depends on how detailed it was, you know?

Chapter 07 – 11:55
Not Enrolled

John Erling (JE): He produced commissioned pieces for The National Hall of Fame ...

Linda Stone (LS): Mhmm (in agreement).

JE: ... for famous American Indians at Anadarko in 1964.

LS: He did a bust of Alice Brown Davis for McCalister. And he took that to the New York World's Fair in 1964. And he presented it there at that World's Fair in New York City, at that time.

JE: The Oklahoma Historical Society, he did a piece for them in '65. The National Cowboy Hall of Fame at the Western Heritage Center in Oklahoma City in 1966.

LS: That have a few pieces there at that museum. The Five Tribes has several pieces. Cherokee Nation has several pieces.

JE: He received the Outstanding Indian Award from The Council of American Indians.

LS: Yes.

JE: He identified himself as being Cherokee. But he was not an enrolled member of any Cherokee tribe.

LS: Right.

JE: ...making that claim somewhat controversial.

LS: To everyone but him.

JE: Okay. Tell --

LS: It was very important — this part of his heritage was very, very important to him. Whatever he could do for the Cherokee Nation, he did. He was big with Chief Keeler. W.W. Keeler is when he did the trilogy pieces. And it was just really important to him to support the Cherokee Nation anyway he could.

JE: Why was he not enrolled?

LS: His family. You know, there was a lot of families that did not sign up on the rolls. There was a group of 'em that left The Trail of Tears and went to Texas to not have to be on that Trail of Tears. Instead they went and traveled to Texas and they settled in Parker County, Texas. And then they were rounded up and moved to Oklahoma. And his family didn't think it was right, and so they did not sign up.

JE: So then people questioned, "You're not on the roll," when there was a good reason for it. Because he was Cherokee.

LS: That happened to a lot of people.

JE: How was he Cherokee? From his father or from his mother?

LS: Mother. His mother. Lyda. Her name was Lyda Hedrick. That was her last name. The Stone family actually came from Stone Mountain, Georgia — from there. So we don't know exactly where all it came from, but, I had my DNA done through a — I got a certificate with a high degree of Cherokee, so. But that's not acknowledged.

JE: As I'm looking at you, you have that look of Native American in you. Very nice, I might say.

LS: Well, thank you.

JE: Right? And so you are Cherokee for sure. And so that came from your father. Because your mother was not at all, so it confirms it.

LS: Yeah, well, you would think. They was going to give him an honorary enrollment number after he'd died, but there was a faction of councilmen that didn't want that to happen. And so they said they did our genealogy and we were Mexican. So...

JE: Oh and they did the genealogy and they said you were Mexican?

LS: So, it's been a little... (chuckling.)

JE: Well, that's the controversy then that went with that. If his parents had only enrolled them, that would have taken care of that.

LS: But, you know, so many didn't because, if you enrolled, then you got an overseer for your property and your family. And they'd take your kids and put them in boarding school.

JE: Oh, okay...

LS: And so a lot of 'em didn't sign up because of that.

JE: They would lose control.

LS: And the overseers would take their land and things.

JE: Okay.

LS: And the kids were not allowed to even be Cherokee because they sent them to boarding school to be white, you know?

JE: Yeah.

LS: And so that's why a lot of people didn't sign up. They didn't want to.

JE: Are you on the roll now? Are you registered?

LS: No. No, you can't unless they have a lineage back to — on the Dawes Commission — you have to be somebody on the Dawes Commission.

JE: But, you know, Former Chief Wilma Mankiller...

LS: Mhmm (in agreement).

JE: She had enough faith in him to believe that he was Cherokee because she designated him as a Tribal Artisan in 1991.

LS: Mhmm (in agreement).

JE: And that allowed him to present his artwork as being American Indian-made under the 1990 Indian Arts and Crafts Act.

LS: Yes.

JE: So there was another area where Wilma Mankiller showed leadership.

LS: Yes, yes.

JE: Okay — and we've already said this — “The Exodus,” in the collection of The Cherokee Heritage Center, is especially well known. It was used extensively in Cherokee Publication. His “Lady of Spring” was included in the '97/'98 White House Art Exhibition: 20th Century American Sculpture at The White House, honoring Native America.

LS: Yes.

JE: The guide to The White House Exhibition calls Stone, “the unsung hero of Native American sculpture,” and describes “Lady of Spring,” which is an elongated female nude, as “... classic art deco ...” And then it was The Gilcrease Museum held its first major exhibition in 20 years, devoted to his work, entitled “Storyteller in Wood.”

LS: Mhmm (in agreement). Yes.

JE: Now you remember all that.

LS: Yes.

JE: And that was quite an exhibition, then, wasn't it?

LS: Yes it was. Yes it was. It was a great, great show. And they published a great book from that.

JE: I've forgotten. Now when did he die, what year?

LS: 1985.

JE: He was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1970. Bacone College awarded him an honorary degree in '72.

LS: Yes.

JE: Oklahoma Christian College in Oklahoma City designated him "... a distinguished American Citizen ..." in '74 and awarded him an honorary Doctorate of Humanities degree in 1976. And I'm relishing reading all of that based on the fact there's still some controversy about him, his heritage, and whether he's an artist or not (chuckling).

LS: Right. Yes.

JE: He received a total of 10 awards between '69 and '80 in jury competitions at The Five Civilized Tribes Museum in Muskogee, which you referred to, including that of Master Artist in 1973.

LS: Yes. Mhmm (in agreement).

JE: I rest my case (chuckling).

LS: Right (chuckling). Oh, yes.

JE: And then he died March 5th, 1985. He was buried in the family cemetery at his home near Locust Grove. Is that near here?

LS: Yes. That's on the south side of the house. We have a little family cemetery out there. He said he never wanted to leave the place. So when he died we said, "Okay."

JE: So he's buried not far from where we're sitting.

LS: Right.

JE: Is there a marker or — big marker?

LS: Yes. We have a headstone out there and, yes... He and Mom.

JE: You went to get one of his pieces here.

LS: Okay. This is called "Raincrow Illusion."

JE: Say that again?

LS: Raincrow. Illusion.

JE: Rain .. cr--

LS: Rain crow.

JE: Raincrow Illusion?

LS: Raincrow Illusion. Okay. See this bird right here is the raincrow (gesturing).

JE: Yeah (looking closely) ...

LS: Okay. And as I turn it around ... it becomes the head of the phoenix bird.

JE: Oh, my...

LS: Isn't that great? It's my favorite piece.

JE: Let me do that. So as you turn it — from the raincrow side — and you turn it around, it becomes ...

LS: The head of a phoenix bird, which is the rebirth. He said the raincrow would alert the phoenix bird when the hundred years — you know, every

hundred years, the legend is the phoenix bird would be reborn. And it was the raincrow that let the phoenix know what it was time.

JE: Oh, that is just a miracle to look at that.

LS: I know and it's the only piece he did that's like this. And this is my favorite piece.

JE: So he did this piece. Did he duplicate many pieces?

LS: No. He didn't like to duplicate. Now, he'd duplicate 'em in bronze because people wanted them. And he did not want to do — carve — two of the same pieces. Not that he didn't --- he didn't want to make two of the same thing. Also, it wasn't exciting to him to do two of the same pieces.

JE: Right. He'd lost his ...

LS: Right. So we have this in bronze, too. So, several pieces that people really liked he'd do in bronze and sell the limited-edition bronze.

JE: What do you think the worth of this is?

LS: Oh, gosh, John...

JE: Priceless. Priceless, right?

LS: Yeah. It really is. I mean, you know...

JE: You don't know how to ...

LS: Well, our insurance. I mean, we have a price on it.

JE: Oh, sure.

LS: But, you know, I think I have probably \$12,000.00 maybe on it?

JE: I just feel fortunate holding it. Holding it!

LS: And he actually, you know, you go to the museums and you can't touch anything, but Daddy liked — because the oil in your fingers, oily hands feeds the wood. And he liked people to hold his pieces. He wanted 'em to be able to feel the wood. So...

JE: Oh, that is just so miraculous.

LS: Isn't that great?

JE: Thank you for getting that piece. Right. So, are any pieces for sale here?

LS: No.

JE: Aw, shucks.

LS: (Chuckling) All the wood pieces are family pieces.

JE: I brought my checkbook (Laughing).

LS: Oh, yeah? Well, okay (Laughing)! \$900,000 will get you one over here.

JE: (Laughing).

LS: (Laughing) Anyway...

JE: (Laughing) Right.

Chapter 08 – 8:25

New Museum

John Erling (JE): The Willard Stone Museum, where we are now, by his home place here in Locust Grove... But you have plans to move out of this building. Tell us your plan.

Linda Stone (LS): Well, this building, obviously, he just ... made it as a place to put his work so people could come see. But he didn't make it a museum as it should be. There's no restroom. It is handicap-accessible, but...

JE: Right.

LS: And, so, after he died, Mom passed away in 2012. And so the property belongs to my youngest brother. But it's not conducive, really, for people to come, you know, visit because it's just not big enough. Well, not having a restroom is a big thing. And getting up here, and parking — it's just not feasible for... And I want it to be a quality museum. And the architect that we have ... we got our 501C3 in 2019. We had our first fundraiser the first weekend in March in 2020. We raised enough money then to buy ... there was an old bank building — the first bank building in Locust Grove — was built in 1912. We raised enough to buy that building and have the demolition done inside. And our architect has drawn up a great building and so we wanna renovate that bank building, keep the outside looking like it did in 1912, but make it into a museum.

JE: Right. And, so, what kind of money is it going to take to make that happen?

LS: Well, right now, I have a building manager and our budget is at — right now to get the building renovated, worthy of the museum — is \$900,000, is what I need right now. We need \$50,000 just to get the electricity done, which is our first step. Because, you know, you can't do anything else in the building without the electricity. So, we're in the fundraising. So far that's what we've been able to raise.

JE: Right.

LS: And then COVID hit, so, it kinda strangled us as far as fundraising.

JE: Well, it's a great idea what you want to do as you're renovating that bank building. That's preserving history there and preserving his work inside of it. It's a great idea. We should mention Jason Briggs Stone, your brother. He was fairly talented himself.

LS: Yes he was.

JE: But he died May 31st of last year?

LS: Last year.

JE: 2022. He was 76.

LS: Yes.

JE: And ... did he work with your father?

LS: Yes. He was Dad's ... Well, I call him "the heir apparent." (Laughing) You know, of the kids. He was who Dad picked to carry on his work. And, so, he gave Briggs the... We call him "Briggs," his name is Jason. Daddy gave everybody nicknames, so his nickname was after Briggs and Stratton Motors.

JE: (Chuckling).

LS: So, anyway, he grew up "Briggs" and that's all we know him as. But very gifted mechanically in the carvings. He does a great job. He did a great job.

JE: He could do that. Probably didn't inherit the creativity of your father?

LS: Maybe not the soul.

JE: Is that right?

LS: The inner soul of it. But he could carve anything that Daddy gave him to carve.

JE: But he was a Master Artist for The Five Civilized Tribes Museum.

LS: Yes. Yes, he was. Uh-huh (in agreement).

JE: And ...

LS: And they have pieces of his work there. And he has pieces, like the Zarrows had pieces of his work. And the Griffins. And several collectors of his work.

JE: Did he ... His children — did they pick up on any of his artistic ability?

LS: He has a daughter that actually does carve. She... Well, she doesn't do it all the time. She has taken it up and she is very good at it, too. But she's not actively doing it right now. She's been getting her master's and working school. Doing, getting school done. So.

JE: Well, she's got a long life yet. So what was your nickname?

LS: (Chuckling). I was not — he just called me "Linny."

JE: "Linny"?

LS: Yeah. It was funny. I was number 8. And I asked Ma — everybody was named after somebody — and I asked Mom who I was named after. She said, "Well, that was the popular name that year." Ya go, "Well, that makes me feel good..." (Laughing).

JE: (Laughing).

LS: All the other ones were... But, anyway, my nickname is "Linny." You know, my oldest sister, Irene, she was named after my mom. Her nickname was "Skeze" and I don't know where that came from. But, yeah. He just liked nicknames. He loved animals. He talked to all of our farm animals, you know.

JE: Well, here I have the names. You can help me. Irene "Skeze" Stone.

LS: (Phonetically) SK-EEZE.

JE: "Skeze." Why did he name her "Skeze"?

LS: I don't know why he picked "Skeze."

JE: "Netty" Sanders, Evelyn Holland, Lida Henson...

LS: Lida Henson. She was named after his mother.

JE: You — Callery, Grant Stone.

LS: Grant was the oldest. He was at the top of the list. Grant Willard.

JE: Okay. Danny Stone, Dwight Stone, Rocky Stone, and Michael Stone.

Chapter 09 – 3:05

Willard Overcame

John Erling (JE): What traits of your father did you admire most, or hoped that you had, or that you're still working on today? Some of his characteristics or traits. What did you admire the most about him?

Linda Stone (LS): Well, like I said, I liked all his ability to create this out of wood the way he did. I was always amazed at that and was paying attention to that all the time. So, that, and his sense of humor, I think. His — he taught us ... Well, his favorite poem was one by Edward Guess called "It Couldn't Be Done." And in that poem it just says that — I had it up, but — you'll have to read it sometime. But it's called "It Couldn't Be Done" and it's — "somebody said it couldn't be done, I, with a grin, replied: 'It wouldn't be so until I tried.'" And it's just kind of say that, if you want to, you can do whatever your God-given talent is. And he also always told us that we were not better than anyone else, but that no one else was better than us.

JE: Mhmm (in agreement).

LS: Because, in the art world, you know, he came from a very poor family and he had to deal with influential people. And that intimidated him. That can be intimidating. You know, he was shy. So he always told us that. And that no matter what race we were, that no one is better than us. But we're not better than anyone else, either.

JE: Right.

LS: I think that's very important. And I think that's why I wanted his story to be told. All that he'd overcome, and he still accomplished what he wanted to accomplish. Now, you know, he never reached perfection. He said there's only one perfect person. So it was striving for perfection.

JE: In his work?

LS: In his work, yes.

JE: Right. I suppose a lot of artists would probably say that. They're working for that perfection.

LS: Yes.

JE: And, when we look at it, we think it is perfection.

LS: Yes. (Chuckling). Yeah, really. Yes. Alright.

JE: His work. You — do you sell any of his work at all? His sculptures?

LS: We sell ... Not the wood, because I'm trying to increase our collection for the museum when we get it made. Now we have bronzes that we sell. And, you know, we put his images on mugs and tiles and different things to sell.

JE: This "Exodus" bronze right here. How much — do you sell that?

LS: Yes.

JE: How much is that?

LS: It is \$4,000.00.

JE: \$4,000. I'll get back to you on that.

LS: Okay. You said you brought your checkbook.

JE: Oh... (Chuckling)

LS: (Laughing) You said it!

JE: I did (Chuckling).

LS: (Chuckling) Or you could do this one for... No, not really. It's wood.

JE: Right, the wood one. Was a bronze made of that?

LS: Yes. Everything he made bronzes out of he sold out the edition. 13. That was his lucky number. When he lost his fingers at 13, which he got really depressed, but that — he come to realize — was his lucky number because that's when his life changed to doing wood sculpting instead of thinking he wanted to be a painter. So...

JE: How did it play out in the rest of his life, 13?

LS: Well, he wanted 13 kids. But Mom said, "That might be your lucky number, but it's not my lucky number" (Laughing).

JE: (Laughing) He wanted 13 because of the 13 number?

LS: Yes (Laughing).

JE: (Laughing).

LS: And he would have been happy had it been 13 boys, but, that's just the way he was, but anyway.

JE: But it sounds like you had a special bond with him.

LS: I did. I did. But he still was ... favorited the boys.

JE: Mmm (Thoughtfully).

LS: You know, he just did. But, yes. In fact, my sisters always called me "Princess," because, you know...

JE: He seemed to like you more, maybe, than the others?

LS: And it's probably because I followed him around and I was interested in his work, you know? So, yeah. So, yeah. That's...

JE: How would you like him to be remembered?

LS: As an overcomer.

JE: Yeah.

LS: And an achiever of his purpose in life. To tell the stories that he tells through his work. Mostly, I think the kids today ... if they can see his story and learn his story about what all he overcame, then I think that would give them hope.

JE: Right.

LS: And adults, too, as far as that goes, you know. But that's what I want to get across to people.

JE: Right. And so let's list this: He was born back in the days of The Depression and his family and they had a hard time making ends meet. And then, of course, that accident when he cut off two fingers...

LS: Three fingers.

JE: ... and a thumb.

LS: Yup. Mmhmm. (in agreement).

JE: And, so, that's when he decided, "Well, I'm not going to stop."

LS: Yeah. "I can't paint, but I can sculpt." Now, that doesn't make sense to me, but... Because it takes more to sculpt than to paint, as far as I'm concerned.

JE: But he had to express himself, didn't he?

LS: Yes.

JE: So he overcame all of that to become this celebrated man that he was. I'm talking too much about it myself. I want you to be doing that. So, you want him to be remembered — you've already stated that...

LS: Right.

JE: ... how much he overcame.

LS: Yes. Yeah. And he has an overcoming story that, I think, the world needs to know.

JE: Right.

LS: So...

JE: Has a book been written about him?

LS: No. My sister and I have always planned on writing a book. And there have been ones kind of written about him. Like, when David Milstein did the book on Thomas Gilcrease. There's a chapter in there about Dad. And then Gilcrease published the last book — it's down... (gesturing) — of all the work they have of his and kind of told his story in that.

JE: Mhmm (in agreement).

LS: But as far as his life story and really what all he overcome and everything, and everything that I learned from him and that he taught us, has not been. It is my hope to do that. I would like to do that. Write that book.

JE: We need to find writers to be interested in him.

LS: Mhmm (in agreement).

JE: I've enjoyed being here and visiting with you about him. And I'm really impressed with his story. You can read about it, but when you see his work,

and visit with you about it ... We have our website. It's visited by students, educators, and all. And so I'm hoping they draw hope and inspiration from this story, because that's exactly what it is. So thank you, Linda.

LS: Thank you. Appreciate it.

JE: I should say: We tried to do this before COVID hit, and when COVID hit, we put it aside, and now we finally did it on February 8th, 2023. Thank you.

LS: Thank you. Appreciate it.

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