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SECOND INTERVIEW

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Field Worker, Bessie L. Thomas,
March 10, 1939.

Interview with Dick Banks,
Marlow, Oklahoma.

I left Vernon, Texas, when I was seventeen years old. My chief occupation up to that time had been working on a ranch as a cow-hand. Having served on (Bar) the H-S Ranch for five years prior to this time, and looking into the future I could see no advancement in the work of being a cow-hand.

The final decision to make a change and go into the Indian country in Oklahoma was reached late one evening as I lay in my cowboy bunk, dreaming of the future. I had met Quanah Parker, chief of the Comanches, and my ambition and boyish desires were to know the Indian as he really was, so on the 3rd day of November, 1897; after checking up with the boss of the ranch I found my worldly possessions to be \$11.85, three cow-ponies, a roll of blankets, tar-

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paulin, a slicker, cowboy boots, spurs, a good saddle, and a cowboy hat, but I was minus a six-shooter. I had been keeping my older sister in school, which took almost all the money I had. So early one morning in the face of sleet, rain and snow, having fully made up my mind, I packed my bedding on one horse, and taking the best horse for my mount, headed northeast in the direction of Ft. Sill. On coming to Red River, some twenty-five miles distant, I saw ice in the water but plunged in, my horses swimming part of the way. After crossing safely, I continued my journey facing a bitter cold northeast wind. I was now in the Indian country and there were no way-side inns nor human habitations along my pathway where I might obtain shelter or food. Riding on in a direct course, the familiar objects that came to my view were, cattle on the ^D D (S D) Ranch and occasionally a herd of antelope, deer, coyotes, and wolves. When night overtook me, I was at the mouth of Coffee Creek where it empties into Deep Red Creek, some ten miles due east of where

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the town of Frederick is today. My three horses were tired and I was weary myself, after being in the saddle all day, so stopped under a big tree just at dusk. The grass was excellent, and I said to my mount, "Old fellow, you'll fare better than I, tonight." As I had ridden all day without any food, after my few sandwiches had given out before noon. So after unsaddling and taking the pack from my pack-horse, and putting hobbles on the front feet of all three horses, they immediately went to feeding on the succulent grass and seemed contented. I decided I would build a fire as I was chilly. Underneath the tree, I raked down deep to get dry leaves to kindle a fire and had a pleasant surprise. The ground was covered underneath the leaves with well-seasoned pecans. Then I knew where I was going to get both dinner and supper. A log fire was soon burning nicely and I proceeded to eat pecans, roasting some in the hot embers, and eating some raw. Then, I'd go down to the creek and drink out of Deep Red, go back and eat pecans, then

drink more water until my hunger and thirst had been appeased. So as the night wore on, thankful for what I had just received, I unrolled my pack and proceeded to make down a cowboy bed.

Tarpaulin is put down first on the ground, then blankets, boots and saddle are at the head and a saddle is used for a pillow. Then the lower end of tarpaulin is pulled back up over the blankets and the sleeper. I was not long in finding sweet repose, many miles from civilization. Nothing disturbed me during the night, only I awoke to find that I was uncomfortably warm. During the early morning hours I was awakened by a pack of howling wolves and a little later the wild turkeys began their morning call which meant that day was breaking. On pushing the tarpaulin back off my bed, I found that I was snowed under some four inches of snow, which accounted for me becoming so warm.

I arose and dressed hurriedly, rebuilding the log fire which was still smouldering. Nearby, snuggled under the brush and out of the wind, were my faithful companions. I put a pack on one, saddled my mount and putting out the fire we broke camp without any morning nourishment.

Still holding my northeast course, I could now see

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the range of the Wichita Mountains which were covered with snow. The snow and sleet on the ground made traveling slow and precarious. At two P. M. I arrived at a dugout where I learned later a boy camped and rode fence line. This was on Sandy Creek, six miles south and two miles east of the present town of Indianhome. These dugout homes were always open to all way-farers who might be passing through the country and the cowboy in charge of the one I had just discovered was out on fence-line duty, on my arrival. I dismounted and proceeded to investigate the premises, finding inside of the dugout a pot of navy beans, seasoned with ham bone and bacon and cooked to a "Queen's taste." I did not wait for an invitation from the owner "Have some beans, stranger," but just helped myself, and when I got my fill there was nothing left but the ham bone. As I had just about finished my meal, the rider of the open range returned to his place of abode to find a stranger inside his dugout. After our exchange of greetings he said, "I'm more than glad you came, we'll go out and kill a beef," which we did and made a big pot

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of Mulligan stew which is the cowboys' favorite dish.

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I was still on the D D Ranch but was in the heart of the Indian country. Mr. McElroy was at this time foreman of this ranch and was rounding up and branding colts near the place where Snyder is today. I went with my new-found boy friend over to this round-up the next day and made a trade with the boss of the outfit, giving two of my ponies for a thoroughbred Percheron stallion, so black they had named him Midnight. Being now on my own resources, I was looking ahead for business opportunities in any way they might come, and putting my pack on Midnight I once again took up the trail leading to Fort Sill. Upon arriving there late one evening I found lodging at a log hotel, conducted by a Mrs. Earheart and her daughters, located on the bank of Medicine Creek a short distance from the hospital in Old Fort Sill. Having been exposed to the cold, bad weather for the past week, I was confined to my room for more than a week. I began to worry about my finances as I had never stopped at a hotel before, and having my

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horses in a livery stable too, was wondering how I would ever be able to pay my bills and get away.

The weather turned out nice and I walked down to an Indian trading post, a short distance from the hotel. While down there I met up with a ranchman, an acquaintance of mine, and told him about my owning Midnight, from the ^D D Ranch. He said, "Will you sell me that horse?" I replied, "He is for sale," and at that we walked back up to the livery barn where my horse was. After looking him over thoroughly, my friend asked me to make him a price. In my boyish way, I said, "Oh, about \$200.00. In later years, I found out that Midnight had first sold for \$1,000.00. Then this man made me a counter-proposition, which was that if I would take the nice buckskin pony with a black mane and tail that he was riding; he would give me \$150.00 in cash. This being my first step in the business world, I didn't want to appear too anxious to cinch the deal but at the same time I didn't want to lose it.

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I finally said, "I'm going to trade with you." Apparently he was more anxious to make the trade than I, as he dug into his pocket and produced a roll of bills that astonished me, peeled off fifteen bright, new, shiny \$10.00 bills and still had a larger roll left when he placed this money in my hands. I experienced a feeling that I never had had in my life before. This was more money than I had ever owned at one time. Having come into possession of all this wealth, I could now see the way clear to paying my hotel and livery stable bills. To my surprise, the lady only charged \$1.00 per day for myself and horses.

The following day, I ventured down to a row of tents where a company of Indian soldiers were stationed at this time at Fort Sill. Continuing my journey down to the Trading Post I met, face to face, Chief Quaneh Parker, whom I had met on the H - C Ranch. He greeted me with a hearty handshake and asked me what I was doing in his country. I replied, "I am on my way to make you a visit, get acquainted with your people; find

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out what they were doing, and how they were living. Quannah said, "Fine, come on out to my home and be my boy." So the next day, I bade "Goodbye" to the good hotel lady and her daughters and headed west for Quannah Parker's home. This act was to be the turning point of my life, opening up opportunities that rarely come but once in a lifetime to a wayward, wandering and homeless boy. On reaching Quannah's home, I had a hearty welcome and was made to feel at home because of the heartfelt interest taken in me by Quannah and all of his family. I was given a room upstairs in his beautiful mountain home and a certain chair at the table on his left. This was the dawning of a new day for me, something different and real. I reached out with open arms and accepted it and was willing to cast my lot with these new-found friends, the Red men. They were kind hearted, met me with a smile and a hand-shake and made me feel like I belonged to them. In a short time I was able to speak and understand their language. Looking over the situation, it seemed

that my future pathway was to be very bright, and that this new country was a paradise on earth. The Apache, Comanche, and Kiowa reservation was approximately one hundred miles square; the Wichita mountains were near the geographic center and the dividing line between the Kiowa and Comanche tribes. Fort Sill was situated at the eastern extremity. There was an abundance of grass, timber, and a number of creeks full of swift-running, crystal clear water, which seemed to come from some living spring. The names of a few of these creeks were, the Beaver Creeks, East and West Cache Creeks, Quanah, Post Oak and Deep Red.

Chief Quanah Parker was commander and chief over all this country and at that time he was loved and respected by all the different tribes of Indians and ruled with a smile and a kind word to all.

I lived in Quanah Parker's home almost a year. His family was happy, and congenial to every one in his home, and the day's work was run almost like clock-work.