Crumbo's Spirit Horse offers an example of detail and fire of artist's work. Leading Indian artist, Crumbo creates in his studio in Sedona, Arizona.

No Feathers for This Indian

Woody Crumbo describes his life as "Chicken one day—guts and feathers the next." That's the way it was, but no more. Presenting a first hand report on the foremost Indian artist of our day by special assignments reporter of Sooner Magazine.

"If you feel you have created, and bettered the deal some, then you've done your work."—Crumbo.

Over in Arizona, down from the high plateau of Flagstaff, low between the towering red walls of Oak Creek Canyon, nestles the little community, Sedona. Motion picture town, tourist town, home town. A town so small that when one of the Hollywood crews rolls in to shoot a western—as regular as Saturday during summers—nearly everybody hops in his jalopy or Cadillac, depending upon how well he appealed to tourists the past year, and signs up as an extra.

All except one man. Woody Crumbo, born Woodrow W. Crumbo 42 years ago, most likely can be found in his small white-walled shop musing over whatever the black-haired, chunky, artist-horsetrader finds to muse about. Unless the hour is between say 11 in the morning and 2 in the afternoon when anyone moseying around looking for Crumbo is to be pointed in the direction of his new polished-log house that clings to the canyon wall.

To city folk this might be disconcerting, but in Sedona, Woody's lunch hour as well as everybody else's varies as much as the wind that whistles down the canyon. And for this man it just about has to be that way.

Woody's life is a succession of inspirations. For his brush to flow over the canvas with any success there must be an inner force guiding it, an ideal must want to force itself out. More rational souls may cry, Hogwash! but just such hogwash has elevated a homeless, flashing-eyed boy into the most successful Indian artist who ever lived. A man who seldom produces a paint-
Crumbo Art Has Great Detail and Emotional Impact
Woody Crumbo, '36-'38, poses outside studio with author’s wife. A boy who knew hunger, Crumbo the man commands $2,000 for most of his paintings.

ing that doesn’t bring at least two thousand dollars—a man whose working dream it is to lift the Red Man to stand among all races as a cultural, economic equal.

In the handling of his career, of course, Woody must be businesslike, and he is: he’s a wily and skillful trader both by heredity and inclination. Yet he is primarily an artist and refuses to be tied down by convention or clock. Taking on nine-to-five he feels would stifle the spirit that flows out through his hands in the form of fierce flaming blue horses, or in direct opposition, fawns timidly nuzzling a sleeping papoose.

A plainspoken man, Woody would probably explain his lack of schedule like this: “I’ve got to work when I feel like it—when I’ve got something to say. You don’t have something to say all the time.”

No, nine-to-five would not fit a man who can lay down a brush one minute and the next be dickering hard with some other horsetrader who would rather barter for hours than to take the more direct route through cash to get something he wants.

The day my wife Kay and I stopped by to see Woody, he had just made a deal with a trader who had driven several hundred miles to get one of Woody’s paintings. In return for a Mission snow scene the fairminded Crumbo had won a silver and turquoise belt worth probably a thousand dollars or more.

Sure, Woody’s a straight guy in a bar-
rolled the eighth grade—"They had to put me there. I was too big to enter the fourth." At 21 he graduated from the Indian Institute of Wichita, Kansas and went on for three years at Wichita University before transferring to O.U., where he continued studying art.

By the time he hit Oklahoma he was well enough known that he could paint his way comfortably through tuition and spending money. His paintings already had been seen in most of the major cities of this country and in at least one overseas.

This implies that the Crumbo high road was smooth. It was not. Woody has a phrase for his life that he still uses, "Chicken one day, guts and feathers the next."

After a couple of years at O.U. Woody received an offer to set up his easel as art director at Bacone College near Muskogee and a while later he moved out into the professional world to free-lance and live his kind of free life. Chuckholes and detours—hunger and stacked-up bills—came up too often. Woody accepted a position designing aircraft parts during the war, the only time in his life he was pinched down by a nine-to-five clock.

This lasted until the war subsided. Then luck boosted him onto his free-lance feet again. Woody received the last of a long series of Julius Rosenwald fellowships, $2,500—chicken for quite a while. For a pot to boil it in, Woody made a deal to collect Indian art objects for the Gilcrease Foundation.

In the meantime he traveled to Indian reservations over the country, studying the folklore of the tribes. On one of these trips he met dark-haired, attractive Lillian Hogue, a Creek Indian and a schoolteacher. As Woody told the rest of the story in his plain language, "After some fast talking, I married her."

The union has been a good one. Woody and Lillian have two children, Minisa, now 12, and Max, 8.

With Lillian, their children, and their chicken and their pot to boil it in, Woody moved to Taos, New Mexico, to join the somewhat-fabulous art colony there. "After six years we decided to leave. It was dog-eat-dog with so many artists around—almost a hundred—so we moved to Oak Creek Canyon."

And it was here in this little community that Woody realized one of his great dreams. Probably because of his life as a boy, Woody has nourished an urge to help lift up the Indian.

For several years at one time Woody ran a school for Indian artists to help them get on their feet in the only way he could. He wasn't rich, but he made sure his students were taken care of and were given an opportunity to show their work. More important, though, he helped them sell.

Woody had worked in nearly every medium—water colors, oil, silkscreen—and he taught his students his skills including silkscreening, a job so difficult that many artists send their work abroad for processing. This project, undertaken on his own in an old adobe building, planted the seed for a greater realization of his dream.

Now his students are in the big time. Mrs. Fowler McCormick of International Harvester wealth has opened a gallery in Phoenix strictly for Indian artists.

Crumbo is the pace-setter, the master that the students shoot to equal, and he admits this modestly. That's another aspect of the man.

When Woody casually says he's the foremost Indian painter in the United States, he mentions it with the same calm assurance that he would tell you he had eggs for breakfast. To him it is an obvious fact that no other Indian artist is turning out either his quality or quantity.
Nor is there anyone who gets such prices for his work, nor anyone who has had the number of shows—more than a thousand! Woody is this matter-of-fact in his estimates of everyone, especially himself.

And characteristically when he walks over to a covered drawing board and pulls back the cloth and shows you the pencilled sketch of an Indian painting he tells you will be the most important ever done, it's like mentioning the eggs were good at breakfast.

(This painting will depict the funeral of Spotted Wolf, a Sioux who died during World War II at Luxembourg. In a letter to his family written shortly before he was killed, Spotted Wolf asked, should he be killed, that the family hold a traditional funeral for him at home. He asked that an unbroken stallion be led in a victory parade.

He promised that his spirit would mount the horse and be with them. As it is shown in oils, the horse ascends from a raised pyre to the sky with the warrior's spirit astride. (Grouped around the base are relatives, medicine men and all that accompanies that tribe's ceremony.)

Woody, before this painting was completed, had turned his main interest to etching, which he feels is "less associated with sign painting and more to art." He has produced several of his most popular silkscreens in the new medium, because he feels that now more people want original works, not mere prints, and through etching they can have them—at a good price but one they can afford.

But when people pay their money they get the goods. Crumbo is listed as one of the foremost authorities on Indians. He has visited and studied at every reservation in the country, and every line in every one of his paintings is authentic and carries out some part of Indian tradition. He is prominent in the Who's Who of the Indian culture.

Yet Crumbo, who looks Indian, knows the Indian as father, mother, and brother, has only one-fourth Indian blood.

He is three-fourths French!

(Editor's Note: The Crumbo paintings that illustrate this article and many others are available as silk-screen reproductions, done by the artist himself, at the University of Oklahoma Book Exchange. A letter to the Book Exchange will provide additional information.)

University's Big Problem . . .

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graduates of Oklahoma high schools. Well, how are we going to be able to sort out those people who are best equipped and be sure that they have their chance for an education?

CROSS: Well, that is a real problem and there is no question but that in the stress of the future, the marginal students will have a tendency to squeeze out the superior students, especially when economics enter the picture. The marginal student will perhaps occupy space which should be filled by a superior student, and that, I think, is perhaps the most important educational problem of the next decade, aside from the matter of providing funds to meet our increasing needs. I would say that we should increase and improve our advisory service to the high school graduate and attempt to find out about the qualifications of our high school graduates early, perhaps during their senior year, and then offer them advice as to where they might find the most effective education in keeping with their aptitude and interest. While we would not refuse them admission to the University, in many instances the advisor might find for them a