

Transcripts of Video for The Catacombs of Yucatan  
Installation 1995 by Dan Senn

The Corn Crib (channel 1 Gladena)

Oh, Gunther and I had been to a movie. We were courting and they were fixing that road from Marilyn's up through the valley there ya know. Grading it and stuff. Just newly graded. And it started to rain and rain and rain and I was kind of worried about the road going home. He didn't worry but I did and I told him, I said, when we got up to Marilyn's place where there's that corn crib, ya know, I said, "I think you'd better stop right here and drive in between those two cribs and put your chains on! You'll never make it up home!" So he decided he would and he got stuck in there! And then we didn't know what to do. He says, "I'm stuck! What'll I do?" And I says, "Well, you'll have to go up to the house and try to get Louie Benson awake so he pulls you out." And Mrs. Louie was such an awful woman to swear and I knew she would and he went and rapped at the door and she says, "Who in the hell is out there?" And then he had to tell her that he was stuck and, I don't know, she read off some other lingo. She was that kind, ya know. And then Louie got up and he says, "I'll be right down, I get my clothes on." So he came and he pulled us out.

Escorting the Girls Out (ch 2 Gladena)

We used to see the boys would escort their girlfriends outside for awhile and then they'd come back in again and we had to keep track of that too ya know.

Dead Husband

Found him laying dead. He was going to take up a load of feed up to the pigs. He'd been in town too late Saturday, and he didn't quite make it. It got dark ya know in the Fall. And when I went to go do the chicken chores and I

thought, "Well isn't that funny he hasn't got that pickup up there yet." And I went and I looked, and here he was gone, ohh...

#### Men in Cabins

She brought meals up and fed the men up here because they stayed in these cabins.

#### Pies and Pop

. . . coming with their arms full of pies and cookies and then they made hamburgers and, of course, the Spring Grove pop was a popular thing.

#### Scarce Money (ch 3 Helen)

At that time, money was pretty scarce. I s'pose if we had a bottle of pop, or one treat I s'pose that was something that we looked forward to.

#### Stuck in Mud

We both started school together in the Courior School right down over the hill here. She was only five and probably not quite ready for school. And one of those muddy days we had high overshoes on but Myrtle got stuck in the mud up on the field here and she could not get out and I could not get her out of the mud, so I had to walk home to get my mother to come and help get her out of that mud.

#### Bare Hills

The hills in those days were bare. There were some high trees, you mean, some of the oak trees, but we didn't have all the brush and that around here at all. I think they may have had some sheep because there was not high grass and it was low grass, but you could see almost down

to the school house and you could see across the valley very easily.

#### Painted Signs (ch 4 Helen)

The brochure has a picture of an indian and the road signs were painted of this indian head and it said "The Catacombs of Yucatan" and it would give a direction. But there were... the were wooden signs were huge, maybe four by six or larger and they went around the country and put them up in all the small towns around.

#### Post Cards

There were some post cards also. We never had one, I s'pose. We couldn't afford to have one.

#### Dust and Dances

There were dirt roads at that time so you would have... we had lots of dust in our house. But we did go over to some of the dances.

#### Watching Benora

It was fun watching Benora Orr being up here dancing and particularly watching her and who she would be dancing with and sometimes asking them to dance with us.

#### Joe from Harmony

Joe Just coming from Harmony seemed, to us, like a long way off in those days.

#### Joe's Imagination

My father was a quite a conservative man and he would sometimes make comments about Joe Just's dreams because as Joe Just, as I recall, he had probably a good imagination.

## Walking Up Here (ch 5 Myrtle 1)

We walked a couple times from our place. That's quite a walk up here.

## The Early Days

We used to go up here but I don't think we ever did anything special before it was built up. We did go to the dances then. Course we went down in the cave a few times. We enjoyed that.

## Big Crowds

The crowds were big when we did go up here, ya know, but it was fun.

## Farming the Hard Way

People didn't go that much in those days as they do now, ya know. Money was scarce, and people were busy farming the hard way.

## Straw Hat

I remember her daughter had a big straw hat on and her mother said she'd better wear it and she didn't want to wear it. She was quite pretty and she didn't want to look funny in a hat, so... But she did wear it, so... ya know.

## Long Time Ago

It was a long time ago.

## Indian Paint (ch 6 Myrtle 2)

One day when they were grading on that road this big catapillar, I s'pose, a bulldozer or something, was coming along and one of the workers saw this clay pot and he tried to flag down the guy on the catapillar but he didn't see

him so he couldn't run in front and grab it, ya know, or else he would have been hit. But when the catapillar hit it it broke... the paint was still liquid in that pot.

### Caged Fox

And right by the dance hall they had a little cage. And in this cage they had a fox. This cage was fastened to a small tree, so he had a little bit of shade but the poor thing was in that cage and all by himself. But of course kids liked to try and feed him or look at him. Poor thing. It wasn't something that made the fox happy.

### Quarter Mile Away

I remember Paul Groetebor and Joe Just coming over and they would come to our house at night and sit and visit and we'd be running over here and watching the progress of the cave being opened up.

### Cave Branches

Oh I'm sure if you keep tunneling through you'll find a lot of these caves will probably come out somewhere else. There's a lot of branches that branch off.

### Cave Teacher (ch 7 Myrtle 2)

One teacher was going to go home from school with us one night and we were going to show her, I s'pose, this cave. So there was this hole in the ground and course we had no flashlights or lanterns or anything. But we did get down on our bellies and slide into the opening. Course we just stayed right in the first opening then.

### Chickadees

There was a big rock, kind of a ledge, and that was our resting spot because it was really steep until we got up

there. Of course Helen was a little bit older and she'd kind of run ahead of me. She'd wait for me there. And then we'd open our lunch pails and these chickadees, they'd come and they'd sit on our shoulder and we'd have a few crumbs of bread and we'd hold out our hand and these chickadees would sit, ya know, and pick at the lunch. And they waited for us every night because they would be singing and chirping away there.

### Family Dances

It was kind of a place for a family gathering ya know. It wasn't just the adults that went to those dances. Everybody brought their children.

### Skeletons

Well, they did find a couple skeletons, ya know, when they opened.

### People Lit Up (ch8 Marilyn)

Some of the people got lit up too, I understand, not only the cave.

### Money Was Scarce

At that time money was pretty scarce.

### A Rare Pop

If we had a bottle of pop or one treat, I s'pose, that was something that we looked forward to.

### Snakes

The woods came right up to our house yard, and so we had a lot of old snakes and that that crawled around. My dad

used to... I remember he'd put some in a sack and told Helen "Here, carry these over in the field." She was holding the sack and the snake was trying to come up through.

### Snake Songs

You know my mother used to say "Oh, well just sing." So when I'd go after the cows I would sing and I never saw a snake. They slithered away.

### Looking Over the Valley

There was a lunchroom down below. Then the dance hall. You could walk from the ground level up above right into the dance hall. On the outside they had a ladder so you could go up on top and that was kind of a lookout. And how beautiful it was to stand at night and look out over the valley and the moon shining on the water down below.

### A Good Time (ch9 Anna)

Well, we had a good time down there.

### Lunch Room

Well, they had that building there where they had the dances upstairs and then the lunchroom downstairs. They used to have dances on weekends a lot of times and that's when I worked down there was at the lunchroom.

### Hamburgers and Pop

Well, all we had was hamburgers, I think, and my mother made sponge cake and sold it peice by piece. And we had candy bars and pop, Spring Grove pop, coffee, I guess, probably sometimes.

## Through Eighth Grade

Well, the only school I went to was through eight grade at Blackhammer.

## I Never Drove

Dad would take me down when I had to go down to work and that. So... but I never drove.

## Ma's Heart Attack

Well, it must have been a heart attack. We were going to a house party. In those days they used to have house parties, ya know. And we were about halfway to their place... Why, she let out one scream, and that was it. That's how fast it went. And that was in '36... January of '36. She was 43... a little over 43 anyway.

## Dad Sold Out

And then I started going out to work at different places. Then when my mother died, why, I was there with Dad then 'til oh... '38. He had... we had auction and then we moved to Spring Grove, my dad and myself, and my brother was in CC camp.

## Breaking Horses (ch10 Oscar)

I got forty dollars a month from him if I could take and drive his horses and plough with them. And he had some devils of horses and he wanted them broke. And I says "I can break anything." Young, ya know. My dad bought broncos from Houston and brought them up and we broke them and we used them, them broncos. We broke a lot of horses.



## Dating

Well I never did date anybody when I was young. I never had enough money to take them even to lunch.

## Bones in a Pile

Must have been two or three or four graves up in there. And they pushed it all out and all the stuff come out. And I can remember the skeletons and the bones and stuff like that that they put in a pile. I believe somebody sent it away probably.

## Dumped Over Hill

It makes me think of everything, but we carried all that stuff out of there and we was there a long time carrying that and just dumped it over the hill.

## Gaustead Boys

But that hill going up there, ya know, there was two Gaustead boys that went offen that and their car went down through the woods ahead of us when we were going home one night. I think we would go from here to that tree, fifty or seventy-five feet. We found the car and we pulled them out of there, my dad and me, and my brother was along too. And then the traffic was stopped for quite a while and I just don't know what ever happened to the boys. But I know one of them was bleeding pretty bad. And my dad was a guy that kind of had been hauling doctors when he was younger too. So he wasn't scared of it; blood or anything, ya know.

## Hot Water Only (ch11 Oscar)

My way in life was, when I wanted water, I wanted hot water and I never used coffee. All the years I worked on road work too I used just plain hot water. I'd come to a restaurant and everybody had their thermos filled and I'd

ask the ladies there, I'd say, "Just put in plain, good, hot water." "Why, what's the matter with you?" she said. And I said "I never used coffee" and I said "I was brought up this way and I used to use milk and sugar in it. But now," I said, "I've gotten used to just plain water wherever I am." That's all I used.

### Hump Backed

My wife used to be a real hard worker. Took care of the garden and she done everything was on the farm. She helped me when we was farming with haying and everything. She was a good tractor driver. But now the last year and a half, she's gotten arthritis so bad in her feet and ankles and they just pain her. If you know Florine, ya know, Florine's getting more hump backed than Flossie.

### Manual Labor

Manual labor. Digging holes and they would blast the stuff out and the way we carried it out was we had a two-by-four that was about eight feet long and we put a little bottoms to that and one man carried it like this and we would walk out with a half a wheelbarrow full. And we went back down in that cave about three hundred feet, I think it was.

### Indian Head

The one head was very good. It was... we started to get careful, see. And. I don't know, I think, probably, we were down a foot and a half in the dirt up there. And that's the only thing that I ever seen of any skeletons going in there all the way we was there.

### Jeepers Cats

Oh, jeeper's cats, they had pretty good crowds for dances.

Served Beer There (ch12 oscar)

And there was some drinking going on, a little bit. I think they served beer there.

Out of Wedlock

They got married. And she had a child beforehand. In those days that was... that wasn't good, ya know. And she was kind of... well... I don't know how to say it decent like... kind of looked down on, ya know, a little bit. Nice girl, too!

Two Pollacks

I wasn't more than 135-140 pounds but they had to have a guy in front of a place where this mixer was to throw in and take out dirt quickly. And he said "Oscar" he said, " I'm going to pay you if you go up there." "It's dirty," he said, "it's awful dirty up in there but," he said, "if you can take that," he said "I'll give you seventy cents an hour." Well I stuck it up right by that old hole and once I lost my cap and it went in the mixer. And I guess my head got full of cement and these two old pollacks from Winona were... they smoothed the road at the end. They were at the very last part of that pavement. They were smoothing with these big pulling things across and getting it level. And they come up to me and they says "Say sonny. Don't you dare do anything but wash your head with cold water and keep on with it or otherwise that hair of yours is going to stick any old way it wants to " they said.

Two Skeletons

But when we opened the Catacombs, at the entrance we dug up two graves. Right there. And there was a skeleton, a

perfect skeleton, the one, of the head, and there was bones and everything. We run into them first.

### Pussy Foot Doctors

He said, "Ya know, Oscar," he says "I don't know what's the matter with me," he says "I can't eat hardly anything" he says "and I went and dropped to 120 pounds." And I seen he was awful thin and he says "I just don't know what to do" he says. "Well," I said, "you'd better go to a good doctor... not hang around these pussy foots around here" I said.

### Dance Hall Built (ch13 Paul)

And when spring came and the weather got warm we decided we'd put up a dance hall. And the local lumber yard agreed to furnish the lumber and we'd pay them as little as we could. And we got a truck from the Ford garage in Spring Grove. They leased it to us for a little of nothing.

### Built a Few Cabins

We decided to build a few cabins. I think we built three. We rented them out once in a while which was nice. People would come up from LaCrosse and stay all night.

### Dance Hall Music

So we got the dance hall built and Bill Sherman, he was a violinist. Someone played the piano, I don't know who, and we had some dances. And then later on we got some bigger orchestras out of La Crosse and we had good crowds.

### No Way Out

Our bookkeeper was doing away with our money and we didn't know he wasn't paying the bills 'til they started to

come out there and crowd us. So we got rid of him but we was so far in by that time we couldn't... it almost didn't seem to be no way out.

#### Dust Bowl (ch14 Paul)

And we had a drought that year. The only moisture we got was in March. We got about two inches of snow. That's the only snow we got all winter. And the ground was so dry. The wind blew every darn day. We got the ground ready to sow the oats and he said, "Well, I don't know whether we should sow it or not if it don't rain." So then he

said, "Well maybe we'd better sow it. Maybe it'll rain."

So then we put four horses on the drill and took the grain out into the field. I filled the boxes and it was quite a long field. And the dust was blowing so you couldn't

see twenty feet ahead of you. So I followed the fence going down and I turned around and coming back I could kind of judge, ya know, the distance from the fence to where I should be coming back. But then I started back again and then I couldn't see the wheel tracks. I couldn't tell where... the wind was blowings so I couldn't tell where I'd been. So he came out in the field again and he said, "How's it going?" And I said, "There ain't no use. I can't tell

where I'm going." And he said, "Well, follow the wheel tracks and I'll walk ahead of you. We'll try that." So we started back and you couldn't... gosh... I thought we never would get to the end. I couldn't figure it out. Here he got to going kiddie corners and we ended up in the opposite corner of the field and went right kiddie corner across the field.

#### Fixed It Up (ch15 Paul)

So we went back with some tools and we hired a few boys. Farm boys. And during the winter, why, we cleaned it

out and fixed the entrance up... cemented the stone and put paths in there.

#### Rattlesnakes

When we first went up there we killed a few rattlesnakes there.

#### Joe Just and Indians

Joe was a different guy. He was real thin and wiry. But I don't know where Joe came from. He could make people really believe that the Indians were still out there in the woods somewhere.

#### Farmer Artist

Well, there was a farmer lived a couple miles from there that was a good artist and we got him to paint the signs. And he painted real beautiful signs with Indians and a picture of the cave and he'd paint signs about... oh.... four by six and we'd put them up around the country. And I'm sorry we didn't save some of them because they were real... ya know, he was a real artist. They were just beautiful.

#### Meeting Gyneth and Bailing Out (ch15 Paul)

On the Fourth of July we had big celebration, a dance, and there was a good looking farm girl came to the dance and I danced with her three or four times and I took her home. And so we went to a show that week and we seen each other quite often. She lived only just a couple miles from the cave. Her father had a farm right west of Blackhammer there and so I think it was about the fifteenth of July, why, Joe and I decided that we wasn't going to make it and if Martha Benson, [who] owned the cave at that time, well... she was kind of antsy. She wanted to

take it over so we'd just go on home back to Harmony and there you have it. And so a couple of nights before we left, why, I was out with Gyneth and I said, "Well, I'm going back to Harmony and times are so hard that I don't think I can ever come back to see you because I can't afford to buy the gas." So I said, "We either get married or say goodbye." So we talked it over and we decided to get married. So we went to Cresco and we married on the eighteenth and that was sixty years ago this last July.

Martha's Hens (ch17 Paul)

Mrs. Benson, her husband Louie... they lived in a farm house right below the cave. That bluff, I guess, was about three hundred feet high probably. The buildings are right up against the bluff. Martha, she was like a kind that wanted to keep everybody in line and she never came up to the cave but she'd holler and we could hear her from down below and we'd go to the edge and she would scold us and tell us what we should be doing and one day, while we were kind of widening it out, the cave, and there was a rock there. It was quite a large rock and the boys put it kind of on the edge of the bluff and somebody said it's going to roll down the bluff but they didn't move it. A day or two later, why, somebody want a give it a kick or something and it rolled down the bluff and hit Martha's chicken coop. And she had some setting hens sitting on some eggs, she was going to add some chickens. And this rock knocked the nests off the side of the chicken coop and they all fell down. The hens ran out and broke the eggs and we could hear Martha for quite a ways that day. She was... feathers flew more ways than one. Not only from the old hens but Martha too.

Dime Pop (ch18 Paul)

But things were tough. I think we got a dollar a couple to dance and hamburgers... I think we got a nickel for the

hamburgers and the Spring Grove pop... I think it was a dime.

### Digging Post Holes

We was trying to fence around the cave and couldn't dig a post hole. So we got the bright idea to put a stick of dynamite in the hole for the corner post and we blew a big hole and we couldn't find any dirt to put back in it. The ground was so hard there was nothing left but a hole in the ground.

### Ploughing

And I said, "Yeah I'd go and plough corn" because I was a farm boy... I ploughed a lot of corn. Of course, I expected to have a team of horses and a one row corn plough. Well it ended up he had instead of a regular corn plough, this is a one that only ploughed one side. You had to make rounds to plough on both sides of a row and one horse. I ploughed all day... that little field.

### Dug Up Skeleton (ch19 Paul)

We dug up an indian skeleton in there and some pottery and arrows.

### Joe's New Generator

And towards spring, why, Joe had been looking around and he found... I don't know where he got it... but it was a practically a new generator. We got that and we built a platform to put it on and hooked it up and it worked real well.

### Bad Debts

They started to come out there and crowd us.



## Martha Took It Over

And then Martha, I think, and Louie, they kind of took it over and I think they had four or five dances after that.

## They Gave Up Too

Times were so hard that there just wasn't enough income to keep it a going. It just... it just wasn't feasible so they gave it up too.

## Joe Just

Joe was a different guy. He was real thin and wiry. But I don't know where Joe came from. He could make people really believe that the indians were still out there in the woods somewhere.

## Two Men (ch20 Paul)

Two men from La Crosse came up and they said they wanted to open a cave north of Spring Grove and they were going to finance it and they wanted to know if they could get two or three to come and look at it and see what we thought about it. So Joe Just and I went over there and we talked it over and we said we could a open it. We'd get some local boys to help us.

## The Chase

Our treasure lived in Harmony and he'd come up on the weekends to pick up the money that was supposed to pay the bills and we found that he wasn't paying the bills. So, one Sunday after we found out, when he came up, we told him he couldn't have the money but he took it and we'd gotten so angry that, and I had a car that was pretty fast, we, the three of us, got in and we drove about twenty mile before we caught up with him and we ran him in the ditch and took the money away from him and told him never

to come back. So, after that, well, we tried to pay the bills but we never seen him again. He got away with a lot of our money.

Joe Just

Joe was a different guy. He was real thin and wiry. But I don't know where Joe came from. He could make people really believe that the indians were still out there in the woods somewhere.