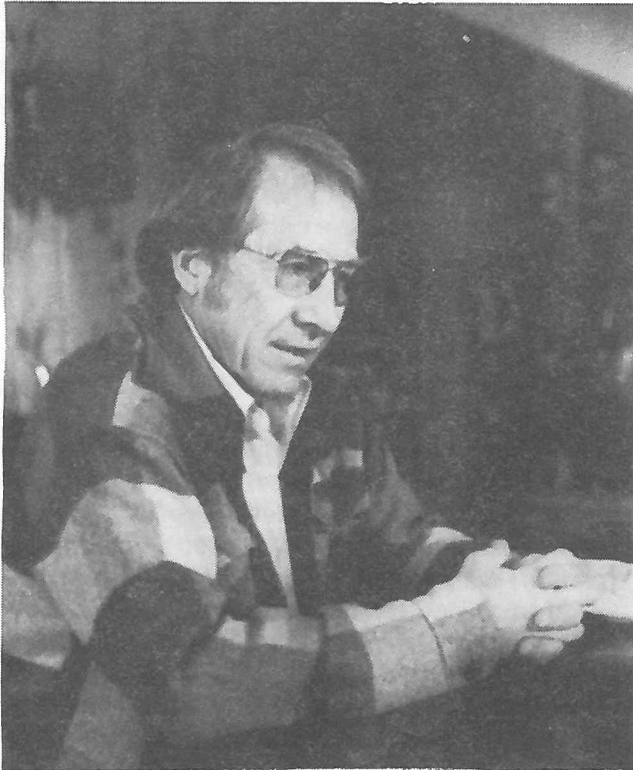


Dr. Earl Smith

*“I have always been closer to
Animals than people!”*

By Richard Gilbert



“I came here in August 22, 1947.”

High in the mountains of Steamboat Springs this fall I had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Earl Smith, one of the most interesting men in this area. Throughout my interview with Dr. Smith, I learned he is a truly warm and caring human being who has positive ideas about life, animals and kids. He shared his philosophies with me as he told me his story.

“I was born back in 1923, down in the San Luis Valley. At that time there were no doctors, so we were delivered by the local druggist. An interesting sidelight of this is when I wanted to get a passport, I found out I was never born. The druggist had neglected to record my birth. I suppose that sort of thing went on all the time, but the army took me anyway, without a birth certificate. My parents didn't seem to mind, either.

“My dad, Edwin Forrest Smith, was a school

teacher and had a very interesting background. He had taught at the reformatory in Buena Vista near Salida. The roads then were just sand, and he had to take his bicycle all the way through the valley. At that time there was no one living there; it was just all wide open spaces. He got himself enough land to get started; then he continued his school teaching. He has been recognized and honored in Colorado for his contributions to education.

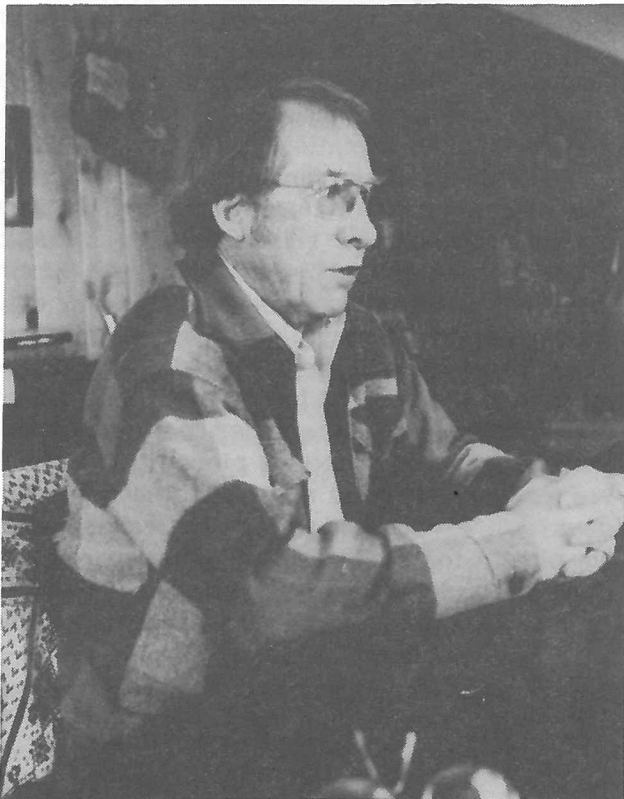
“The more I think about it, the more I realize that there was a very close relationship between my father and us kids. I remember ice skating on a beautiful lake nearby, and we went hunting together. He was a companion all the way down the line, although he did not involve himself too much in the farm. The family did all that. He really was the one who brought in all the money. We had a lot of fun; in fact, he organized a family orchestra in which we all played instruments. We would practice at night. Ah, those were the days! We were called the Smith Orchestra, and we played for all the school functions. Mother played the piano, and I played the flute and the drums. That was when I was younger, because



Dr. Smith and his wife, Katherine

we needed a drummer. As I got older I wanted to play the flute, so I became the flutist.

"Oh, things were different then. I can tell this much, quite different than what they are now. One of the interesting things was the old school bus. We always took the school bus home with dad, and we lived way out in the country. It was an old Model-T type that looked more like a carriage than a bus. In the mornings we would have to go out and build a fire underneath the motor, and the fire had to burn for an hour before we could get that motor to turn over. Of course, we had to crank it. All in all, it was a fascinating life because we dealt with the hardships as they came, and it was hard. I didn't know at the time we were enduring hardships, but as I look back on it now one of the highlights of growing up was living through the Depression, although we weren't aware there was one.



"You may think it's crazy, but these animals talk to me."

"We didn't have any money, so we ate what we killed, like our own meat, whether it be pork, chicken, geese, or beef. We milked our own cows, made our own cheese and butter, and we had our own chickens for eggs. So we never knew there was a Depression. The only thing my mother bought was my shoes, for a dollar a pair. What groceries and staples we had to buy we would barter for eggs. We didn't deal much with

money. My mother and I did the gardening for our vegetables. I was a number one gardener. We were limited to what we could grow in the San Luis Valley because of the short season, but we raised every type of vegetable and all kinds of things. We learned gardening from the family; it was handed down through the generations. I learned by doing, and surely had lots of teachers, since I had four brothers and two sisters. Since then all of them have become well known and appeared in *Who's Who in Colorado*. Now they are scattered throughout the country.

"But back to the farm. Along with the vegetables we had many horses, cattle, sheep, pigs. We had the whole gamut of animals, and that's probably one of the things that led me into the field of veterinary medicine. We had to be our own veterinarian. Of course, then we just said "animal doctors". We had to do everything. I remember an incident when sleeping sickness hit all of our horses. We had 18 head of horses and lost all but one to sleeping sickness. That was my little pony, and I always said he was too ornery to die.

"We tried our hardest to stop the disease from spreading, but at the time all we had was Doctor Watkins remedies. The Watkins men would come around at least once a month, and he would have all these remedies. To this day, I don't know what those remedies were. I think they were mostly turpentine. We used them in every fashion: we put it on wounds, we poured it down the animal's gullet, and the cure usually worked.

"As I said, there were no doctors at that time and I didn't have much knowledge of helping animals, but if I did have a special gift, it was my sensitivity. What made the biggest difference in my becoming a veterinarian was an experience I had with a cat that got into a trap. I was about eight years old at that time. The trap had crushed his leg beyond repair, so I just amputated the leg. There was nothing else to be done. I got out my pocket knife, thinking only of the best thing for the cat, and wrapped a string around the cat's leg to stop it from bleeding; then cut it off. My sensitivity towards animals' illness and pain probably led me into the field of veterinary medicine.

"My parents encouraged us kids to get a college education, and they backed us in whatever field we chose, but they didn't hand us an education. We had to earn it, and I did so by trapping muskrats. Trapping muskrats, at that time, was the most profitable thing a person could do. They were a dollar a pelt. Of course, going to college only cost two to three hundred dollars a year which included tuition, living expenses and everything. If I really trapped hard, I could finance my way through a full year

of college. Some buyers only offered 50 cents a pelt, but I had to say 'No!', and we'd bargain for a while to get a better deal. I would usually get the dollar since pelts were so popular. The pelts were made into coats and hats. They were very much in demand. I also trapped ermine; that's the weasel. I trapped beaver, but there weren't as many beaver then to be trapped; besides we liked the beaver because he built dams for us. There was a stream that ran through our place, and the people on it accepted the fact that little Earl Dean was going to be along trapping it because they knew it was putting me through college at C.S.U.

"To earn a veterinarian's degree I had to go to C.S.U. five years. There were some unique things about my situation. I went through school rather rapidly. When I graduated from veterinary school I had just turned 21. I was the youngest veterinarian ever to graduate from the school. The five year requirement was speeded up because we were at war, and they wanted us

"When I graduated from veterinary school I had just turned 21."

to serve as veterinarians in the service. We had to go both winter and summer. From my sophomore year on I was under the guidance and support of the government. I was under the A.S.T.P. or Army Specialized Training Program. I went through grade school fast because I skipped grades. Thinking back, I would never let a child of mine do that. I was rather an oddity, but at the time I thought it was great. I was able to do the academic work, but I missed out on the social life because there were no girls who were my age. Consequently, I didn't date. When I graduated I was still pretty small, just five feet tall and under a hundred pounds, so I couldn't participate in basketball or baseball, which were the only sports. There was no wrestling then, so I didn't wrestle. I was a misfit."

"The people accepted the fact that little Earl Dean was going to be along trapping."

I asked Dr. Smith about his nickname "Pinky." "When I was in college a girl that I dated had a roommate who said, 'Oh, you're going to go with the pink headed kid.' At that time my hair was very red. Everyone on campus started to call me "Pinky," and I thought when I moved to Steamboat I could get rid of that name. But, lo and behold, Don Blake, who works down

here in the assessor's office, was a student at CSU when I was and lived on the same block. When I met him on the street one day he called me "Pinky", and the name stuck to this day. I decided since I can't get rid of it, I will just accept it."

I then asked Dr. Smith about his military experiences. He told me about his specific job while in the army. "There were many fields veterinarians could be involved in while serving in the army — mine was procurement. We got all the food, meat, eggs, butter, cheese, milk. We *"I was rather an oddity, but at the time I thought it was great."*

worked mostly out in the small rural towns where we would make contract for so many thousand cases of milk, a car load of eggs, so many hams, etc. Then we would have to follow those all the way through the processing plants to see that they met the army specifications. The food there went into storage, and property of the army. It was fascinating; I loved it. My disadvantage was being too young to be an authority image, but in spite of that I advanced in rank very rapidly. I was a captain when I was stationed in New York City. I had to ride the subway into Grand Central Station and change levels in order to catch the sub to lower Manhattan called the 'Battery,' where we were loading food onto ships. I never got through the

"I was the youngest veterinarian ever to graduate from the school."

station without getting stopped by the MPs, the Military Police. They didn't think I was old enough to be a captain, so I just carried my papers with me. When they would stop me, I would just pull out my papers to prove my identity before I could go on. I seldom got through Grand Central Station without being stopped.

"The veterinary corps was highly trained as the ones to check for the quality of what was being purchased, to insure a high standard. We were trained in inspection, including food inspection. I inspected any place where military men ate. I inspected the restaurant facilities, virtually everything having to do with the consumption of food.

I asked Dr. Smith about moving while in the military. "Yes, I moved around quite a bit. I started out in Chicago and went to Columbus, Indianapolis, Cleveland, and ended up in New York, where I had a fascinating tour. They were



*“We had to be our own veterinary. Of course,
then we just said animal doctors.”*

starting to bring back the family service men. I remember on one occasion they had a lot of sickness aboard the **Queen Mary**, and officials didn't want the **Queen Mary** to dock until they found out what this sickness was. I was part of the team of doctors that went out on a PT boat and transferred to the **Queen Mary** to see what the problem was. It ended up that the problem was in one of the coolers where they kept the milk. The refrigerant was getting into the milk and making all these babies sick. As soon as we found that out, the ship could come in the dock. By now, the war was over in Europe, but it was not over in Japan. I was given the opportunity to either leave the army when I did in '47 or to reenlist and go to Japan. They would have given me another advance in my rank, but I was impatient and wanted to get on with my own veterinary practice.

“I can still remember when I went to work for the veterinarian in Ute, Iowa. He had not had a vacation in a long time, so after a spell I took over his practice. In the winter months I found out one thing, I didn't want to live in Iowa. It was rough trying to vaccinate pigs in those sheds with the low ceilings. Dust fumed up and we choked. I would vaccinate as fast as I could and then run to the window and stick my head out so I could breathe. I said, 'Now, wait a minute, life is

too short for this!' I was pretty well used to the blue sky and clean air that I knew so well in the west and couldn't stand grey Iowa, so I moved to Santa Fe. My brother who is a veterinarian there was in a plane crash and needed somebody to take over his practice. So off to Santa Fe I went. When my brother recovered, which took about three months, I came back to Colorado looking for a place. Some one said to me there might be a place in Steamboat Springs. Into the unknown northwestern part of the state I went. I'll tell you, when I came over the Rabbit Ears Pass I was convinced that this was God's country, and I didn't care what I had to do I was going to live in this country. I never left.

“I came here in August 22, 1947, in what I called the 'Robin Egg', a blue Plymouth coupe, my only material possession. It didn't last long on the roads here in Routt County; especially the old curvy rough but picturesque road coming over the pass. Highway 40 was the only road in the county which was oiled.

“There was a veterinarian here whom I had known in school and due to ill health in the family he wanted to leave. Doctor Utterback was here at that time too, actively practicing veterinarian medicine. But I started my own practice, and it was tough because the people of this country were mostly ranchers and they would not accept

a 'kid'. I wasn't mature at all, and they didn't trust me. They didn't think I could know anything about animals.

"The first year my total income was 13 hundred dollars, so I learned how to hunt to eat. I learned how to eat porcupine that first winter, and I did lot of fishing. Besides fish and porcupines, I ate whatever game I could get, even ducks. My dad had given me a single shot 22, and, thank goodness, because that's what kept me alive. I had a wife and a child, a daughter, and again, we never knew we were poor. We just knew we had to have a meal on the table, so I would take the gun out and shoot game, just out

*"We didn't have any money,
so we ate what we killed."*

the back door. I owned five acres right across from the high school. I had a coal stove, and coal was very cheap and it worked out fine. In fact, I was talking to my kids the other day and I asked them, 'Did you know how poor we were through the years that you were growing up?' They said no. We weren't poor; we just didn't have any money, so we did all the things that didn't cost anything. Swimming here was practically free. The ski hill was the community recreation. My kids and I went skiing every free moment. I always bought their skis second hand for a dollar or two.

"This was cow country and the economics of this country was based on ranching, so it was cattle with many real cowboys and horses. The bronzes that you saw in the other room brings back great memories to me because that's the way it was done when I came to Steamboat. Just a cowboy and his horse. His horse was his life blood. Getting into the hills to check cattle and everything was done by horse. I treated mostly cattle and horses, also a few pets. I had a little one room hospital across from the high school where people brought in their pets to be treated. I enjoyed that too, but the thing that I doctored most was cattle and eventually sheep.

"I treated large animals for 25 years, and then the character of the country changed. The old time ranchers that I had learned to love were selling their ranches and moving, and the people coming in were not the same type of people at all. They were of a different philosophy. Their ranches and cattle were a hobby, not their life blood. When I saw this happening I said, 'Wait a minute,' and I almost left the country. But then I decided I had a pretty good small animal practice going so I thought why don't I just do dogs and cats? Ever since then I have done just that.

"After all these years it would be awfully

difficult to say what my favorite animal is. When I worked with cattle I loved them, and when I worked with horses I really loved them. I don't mean to blow my own horn, but I took a back seat to nobody when it came to treating horses. When I went to small animals at first I didn't have any love for cats, but right now I think cats are great, and I think dogs are great. The only things that I am still having difficulty with are the exotic pets. I am talking about exotic pets such as ferrets, monkeys, cheetas, boas constrictors; I am not really excited about working with them.

"Once I had a gerbil that need a Ceasarean, so



Dr. Smith's wife, Katherine.

would you believe we did one? We never expected the thing to survive, but the next morning when I came to the hospital I could hear 'Scratch, scratch!' and the stinker was up in the ferris wheel running around as hard as he could. I called the owner and said 'You'd better come and get this gerbil; she seems to be all right.' I still doubted she would live, but he took her home and she lived a good long life (for a gerbil). Can you imagine operating on something about the size of your thumb? I ended up using my eye surgery instruments for the operation.

"I was trained to treat the animal kingdom,

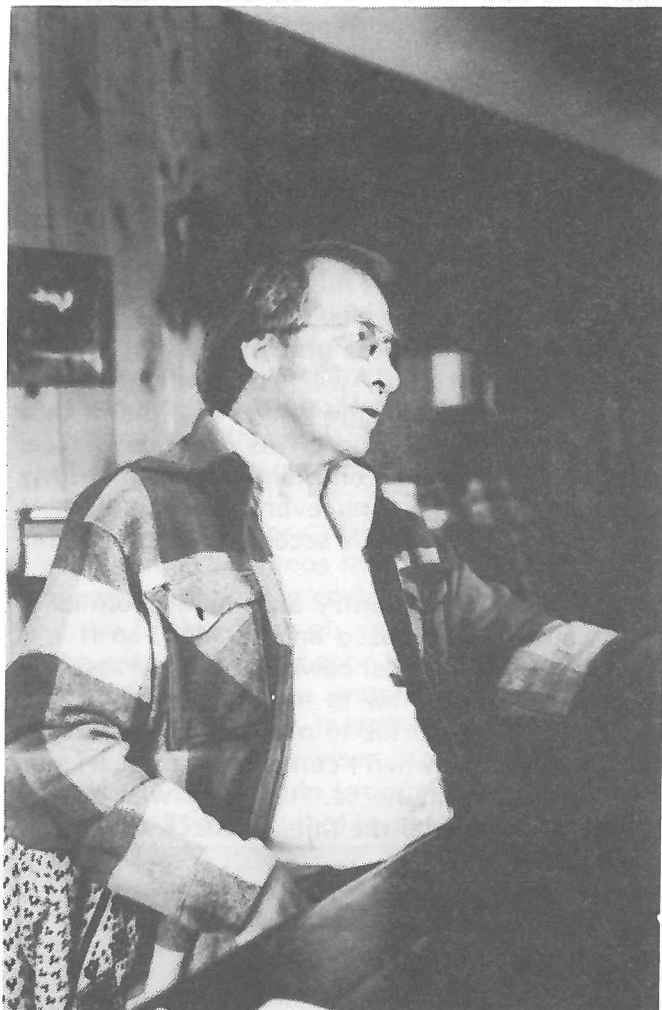
and, of course, we as humans belong to the animal kingdom, so there is really not all that much difference between us as humans or any of the animals that I treat. Each one has his own unique characteristics, like the normal temperature of a chicken is 107°, the normal temperature of pig is 104° and the normal temperature of the sheep is 103°. The normal temperature of a horse is 100° and here we are, 98°. It took me a while to figure out that this difference in body temperature prevents disease that we have in all of our four legged animals will not get into a chicken's, because a chicken normal temperature is 107°. Bacteria can't live in that environment. You can do anything to a chicken and never have to worry about an infection related to other animals because that's not what they get, whereas a horse is closer to a human, and you will find there are a lot more diseases transmissible between a horse and man. It's a fascinating thing to realize that nature set it up so we have barriers to prevent the exchange of diseases. But there is one universal disease, rabies. That will affect all warm blooded species."

Next I asked Dr. Smith about his treatment of exotic animals. He replied, "The nastiest and most filthy animal that I have ever treated was a monkey. The most infuriating one was a civet cat; do you know what that is? It's not a skunk. These people brought it in and said 'We have a baby skunk we would like you to descent.' I said fine and instantly that thing exploded out of the box and ran up on top of the cabinet in the reception room and proceeded to spray the whole place. That was no baby skunk; that silly thing was a full grown civet cat. Civet cats don't get as big as skunks and they have spots and not stripes.

"My hardest task was to remove a bullet from the spinal column of a dog. That bullet had lodged tight, so we went in and had to trim away the bones that surrounded the spine. I gently removed the bullet hoping there was no permanent paralysis. The reason I remember this case so well is because it lived and the dog walked again. I still get a lot of cases of dogs shot by ranchers. Dogs cannot be allowed to run loose while cows are calving. The cows get so excited that they will walk right over their young and kill them. A rancher knows this and warns everyone around him to keep their dogs away or they'll be shot. Ranchers don't have any reservations about shooting dogs, so we get lots of gun shot wounds; in fact, we are almost specialists in that area."

I then asked Dr. Smith about his plans for retirement. "Oh, I am not going to quit; I'm just getting revved up. Dr. Baldwin, Dr. Kuntz and myself began a partnership in October which

will give me a lot of time to spend on inventions and other projects. I started the KaMar Corporation which manufactures a device for detection of estrus, or heat in cattle, an aid in knowing when to breed a cow artificially. That was patented in 1963. And is whole business in itself. Now we manufacture them in our own plant in San Diego. We ship the new detectors here and mail them out to our customers. The office of KaMar Co. is in that new rock-faced building in back of the veterinary hospital. Carl Vail handles all of that.



"The first year my total income was 13 hundred dollars, so I learned how to hunt to eat."

Our KaMar Company is about to come on the market with a new product that will be a way to monitor the health of a dairy cow, but I won't go into it because we are not on the market yet. Currently KaMar manufactures a piece of equipment that will tell the exact time of ovulation in a mare. This is important if you have a very valuable stallion and want to breed that stallion to a mare only once. If you don't know when she is ovulating you don't know when

to breed. And a stallion may have to breed a mare several times instead of conserving him for several mares.

"I am really excited about continuing actively in veterinary medicine and not having to get out of it, because I don't want to leave veterinary medicine. It means too much to me, I feel good when I am taking care of an animal. This may sound ridiculous, but those animals talk to me. I love them and I wouldn't give them up. I am closer to many of the animals than I am to people.

"During the time of the large animal practice I was driving about 50 thousand miles a year in Routt County. I had time to think and conceive a lot of ideas, many of which couldn't be brought into their own until some new technology came along as an example. The dairy cow health monitor, the one I mentioned earlier, would not have been possible without the computer.

"I really like to work with pets and farm animals, but I'll tell you I have no desire to work in a zoo. Those animals are wild and that's what bothers me about treating exotic pets; they are wild, and should be left that way. They are not domesticated animals and they are not in their normal habitat....

"The country life is good for me. I love it. I could live in a city because I would never say there was anything I wouldn't do. Gosh, I lived in New York City, traveled the subways and went into Grand Central Station every day, but now I just want to continue my love for animals and the country and stay right here. Country people are laid back and don't try one-upmanship. They have time to sit down to talk with you, while city people somehow are running in high gear all the time. The life style is the thing that I enjoy about the country. Seeing the life style changing here in 1971 really bothered me, but I am pleased to announce that the people who have come into this area have become more the laid back rather than leaning toward the rapid pace that they came from. I only hope this trend continues, because it will take away the very essence of this country if they make us just another metropolis. I hope that never happens.

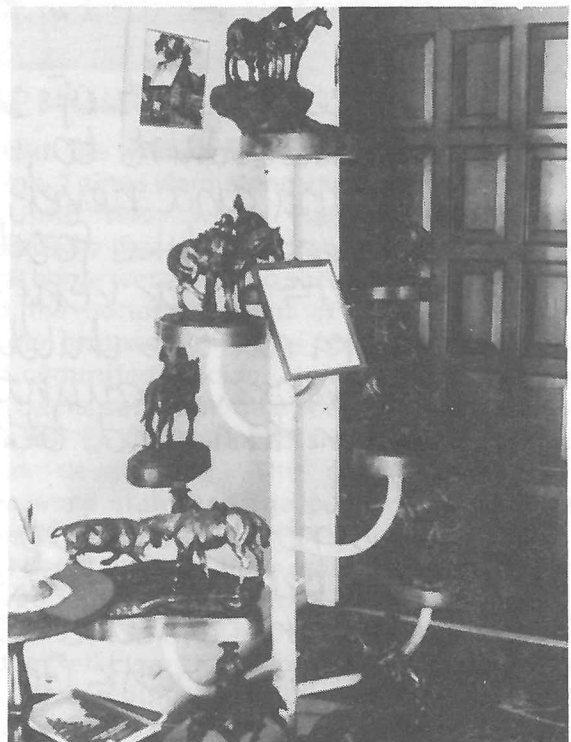
"I believe every person is endowed with talents and a dream. I honestly feel that every person should be encouraged to pursue that dream and also become aware of their talents and work to develop them. So many people are doing what they think they ought to be doing and not what their heart dictates. That's why I find so much joy in living. I keep my health by having a positive attitude and a positive approach to life. That's what makes the difference in health; one who is uptight about everything and afraid to let go and live, gets to feeling that there is nothing to live for and he gets depressed. That person is

going to be sick and there isn't anything you can do about it. I say, if you want to be healthy and happy, be outgoing and happy with things as they are."

I then asked Dr. Smith about his feeling of youth today. "Well, basically there isn't any difference in the kids today and when I was a kid. They still dream dreams and want to be important to someone. If there has been a change, it's that the kid expects to be entertained rather than being creative and creating his own entertainment. We didn't know what it was to be entertained. We didn't have a T.V., and the only

"I'm just getting revved up!"

radio we had needed earphones to hear it. We didn't know what it was to go to a movie, and we didn't have enough money to buy toys. So we created everything that we had. We made bows and arrows, and we figured out ways that we could play Indians and cowboys, and we learned how to be alone and daydream. You see, they didn't have many sports where I came from. The bigger schools had sports, but my school was too small. I support sports because I think they are an outlet for the kids, but I just wish that they weren't quite so structured and there wasn't so much pressure to win. My oldest daughter was a top skier, went to Junior Nationals and that sort of thing, but my other kids said, 'Hey, this is fun



"The bronzes I showed you are the way the cowboy was with his horse."

just to ski!' So they just skied and enjoyed the sport to its fullest. Kids today miss the freedom of a whole bunch of kids just getting together to play back lot games of baseball, softball, run sheep, run, or kick the can. Our school social events consisted of a Halloween party and a Christmas program, and that was it except for the school picnic the last day of school. Church was an important thing because we all stayed in town after church and had a picnic and played games, while the adults talked adult things. Basically I was at home six nights a week. My mother would have the women in to make quilts in the afternoon about once a month when they all got caught up on the local gossip.

"A lot of important people have contributed to my life, from my pioneer parents to my many brothers and sisters who looked after their little brother in his formative years to the great experience of growing with my own family and home, to the gift of Steamboat and the many people who have helped me over the rough spots of life. Like my wife, Katie, who has been associated with me for 25 years, or Carl Vail, who has been a very important influence in my life — but that is a whole story in itself — I guess none of us really ever did anything without someone helping us along the way. People do need people.

MOUNTAINS

Our mountains are such lovely things
I often wish that I had wings
And then I'd never stop
Until I reached a mountain top.
Then I would sit and sing and sing
And never think of anything
Away from where the people trod
I'd feel so very near to God.

No!

I feel a sort of shame that I
Should want to just take wing and fly
To sing and never never think
Would be like food with naught to drink
God is never very far away
From all His children made of clay
On second thought I'd stay right here
Near Him, and other friends so dear
Yes!

The mountain top still calls to me
Its beauty is the same to see
But I'm content to work and play
And just thank God for each new day.

Taken from "Poems" by Anna Bowie May (1946)