



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.*

By ROBERT TALLEY, '55

*"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

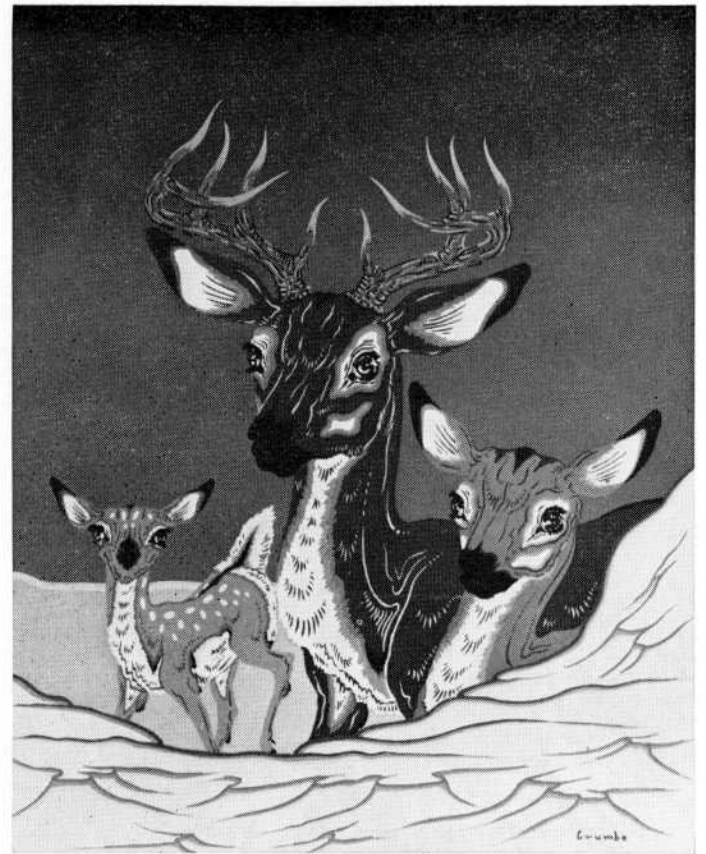
well he appealed to tourists the past year, and signs up as an extra.

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 plain spoken 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 fair-minded Crumbo had won a silver and turquoise belt worth probably a thousand dollars or more.

Sure, Woody's a straight guy in a bar-

gain hunt, but he'll dicker with the best—but only if they're reasonable. "There's no pleasure in it if either one tries to outdo the other too badly," says Woody. "The idea's to trade something he wants for something you want." He paused reflectively, "Occasionally some fellow will pull a fast one, but you can usually find a way to square it later on. . . ."

This desire not to get the better of the other guy may appear even more surprising when you consider Crumbo's background . . . or perhaps on the other hand it may fit him perfectly. Depending upon the way you look at it, you could see either generosity or pinch-penny equally logically following from his childhood. Fortunately generosity won out.

Woody was born near Lexington, Oklahoma. His father, who was a horsetrader, died when he was seven, leaving the proud boy to stuff that pride deep in the hollow of his stomach and go to live with other Indian families, first one and then another. Poverty he knew as well as the hunger cramps in his stomach. It was after he was shifted to Anadarko where he stayed with Kiowa and Comanche families that the boy's first real break came.

He had been through the third grade at Chilocco Indian School before his father's death, and he quit then for more than 10 years. During this period of scholastic freedom Woody found time to sketch as most boys do, but there was something in

the child's work that fascinated the Anadarko Indian Field Matron, Mrs. Susie Peters.

Mrs. Peters spotted genius. Sure it was amateur and undeveloped and undirected, but that brilliant flame smouldered there in his hands, waiting for the breath that would ignite it. Mrs. Peters saw this and encouraged Woody and several of the other boys to create out of their knowledge of Indian lore, even though "some of us were so small," Crumbo said, "that we sat on gallon buckets and used the backs of chairs for easels."

And Mrs. Peters didn't stop there. She watched them and worked with them and found materials for them. And when they had progressed she found markets for their work—Woody's first sale was to the San Francisco Museum of Art and it became a part of the permanent collection there.

This of course was many years ago, but Mrs. Peters, the woman who had the vision and drive to help the Red People under her care, lives in Anadarko now, the almost unheralded mother of Indian art. "Mrs. Peters was our inspiration," Woody said. "She was the one who started us off—and she was the one who gave us our big encouragement."

Woody stayed out of school, painting constantly, making something of a living selling his colorful Indian figures. At seventeen he decided to return to school. He en-

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rolment reached an all-time peak of between 12,000 and 13,000. With the facilities available on our Main Campus at that time, we could not hope to provide classrooms and laboratories for more than 8,000 students. Our housing situation was also critical. We had no provision for married students.

In May of 1946, the University obtained the use of the entire Naval Air Station, now called the North Campus and Max Westheimer Field. The buildings were suitable for converting to classrooms and laboratories were modified immediately. This work was completed by the opening of school in September. Entire departments and many classes were moved to the North Campus. The Land and Appurtenances, Buildings and Structures, and Personal Property were inventoried at over seven million dollars.

On October 14, 1946, the N.A.T.T.C., south of the Campus, was turned over to the University; a property transfer inventoried over 13 million dollars. We immediately began to remodel and equip 15 buildings which were used for classrooms and laboratories.

Housing facilities were also modified to accommodate the students.

That was a hectic time, but we did succeed in providing the space which was needed in this emergency.

I would like to say something about the personnel of the Department. I have not referred by name to any of the employees of the Physical Plant Department. There are so many rendering fine service to the University that I would not name a few and leave out the others. The work of the Phys-

ical Plant Department of the University covers many phases of endeavor and the employees range in ability from unskilled workmen to highly skilled mechanics and professional engineers. These, together with the secretarial employees, form the backbone management of the University. On the whole these employees are industrious, conscientious and loyal. They are aware of the importance of their work and know that the "show must go on."

In my twenty-eight years of service I have seldom seen or heard of an employee who would refuse to work day or night in an emergency, and I want to add that in our work there are a lot of emergencies. These employees have enjoyed the good will of the President and of the Faculty. There is hardly a week passes that I do not receive a phone call or note from someone on the front stage commending the work of some of our employees. For these thoughtful reminders we are sincerely grateful and thankful that we are identified with a great and progressive University.

### *A Student Views Dallas . . .*

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Texans at Austin were saying the same thing, with a slightly different meaning.)

The campus has been quietly academic except for the Dallas weekend. With the back-to-school activities over and eight-week exams coming up, almost everyone has settled into a more conservative routine of life. The classroom is king, and many of us are now realizing that the mountain of study assignments won't get any smaller by just thinking about it.

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tered 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—near 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 pinned 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.

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## Hal Muldrow, Jr.

'28

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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

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