

**TRANSCRIPT**

**INTERVIEWEE:** Wyman Meinzer

**INTERVIEWER:** David Todd

**DATE:** January 30, 2023

**LOCATION:** Benjamin, Texas

**SOURCE MEDIA:** MP3 audio file

**TRANSCRIPTION:** Trint, David Todd

**REEL:** 4140

**FILE:** AmericanBison\_Meinzer\_Wyman\_AbileneTX\_30January2023\_Reel4140.mp3

**David Todd** [00:00:03] Well, good afternoon. I am...

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:00:05] Good afternoon, sir.

**David Todd** [00:00:07] Thank you, Mr. Meinzer.

**David Todd** [00:00:09] I have the privilege of being here with Wyman Meinzer and, with his permission, we plan on recording this interview for research and educational work on behalf of the Conservation History Association of Texas, and for a book and a website for Texas A&M University Press, and finally, for an archive for permanent access and use at the Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin.

**David Todd** [00:00:38] And I really wanted to emphasize that while those are our plans for the recording, this is Mr. Meinzer's story. And so, of course, he would have all rights to use the stories and materials as he sees fit.

**David Todd** [00:00:54] So, I wanted to make sure that that's okay with you before we went in any further.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:00:59] Certainly. That's fine.

**David Todd** [00:01:00] Okay. All right. Well, thank you.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:01:03] Mm hmm.

**David Todd** [00:01:04] Well, let's get started then.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:01:06] OK.

**David Todd** [00:01:06] It's Monday, January 30th, 2023, it's about 1:40 in the afternoon, Central Time. My name is David Todd. I am representing the Conservation History Association of Texas, and I'm here in Austin. And we are fortunate to be conducting an audio interview with Wyman Meinzer. It's a remote interview. While we're in Austin, he is in the Abilene area.

**David Todd** [00:01:37] As a way of just a really brief introduction to Mr. Meinzer's life and career, he's been a professional photographer for over 45 years and has also worked as an author, a historian, a predator hunter, and recently, a realtor.

**David Todd** [00:01:54] He's contributed to at least 27 large-format books, illustrated over 250 magazine covers, and has been recognized as the official state photographer of Texas.

**David Todd** [00:02:09] And of special interest today, in 2011, he and Andy Sansom produced a book called, "Southern Plains Bison: Resurrection of the Lost Texas Herd". It was about the introduction of that iconic Charles Goodnight herd from the JA Ranch to Caprock Canyons State Park.

**David Todd** [00:02:33] There are a number of other interesting things he's done, but I know that that'll be a good entry point to talking about Mr. Meinzer's life and career to date, and especially getting a chance to focus on his work with the bison.

**David Todd** [00:02:47] So with that short introduction, I wanted to just ask you about your childhood. I understood that you grew up on a very large ranch, a 27,000-acre tract called the League Ranch.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:03:01] Mm hmm.

**David Todd** [00:03:01] And I was hoping that you might be able to tell us about your early years there, and any family or friends or experiences that might have helped inspire your interest in the outdoors and wildlife and photography.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:03:13] You bet. Yes. I was born in 1950. And I think when I was about one or two, one and a half, something like that, my dad took the foreman's job on the League Ranch, which was, as you've already, you've already mentioned, it's 27,000 acres right outside of Benjamin, Texas. Actually, we lived 11 miles from the county seat in Knox County.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:03:38] And although I worked as a, you know, grew up working cattle and as a cowboy and such, my main interest was in wildlife. And, you know, I was constantly hunting all the time and spending time running traps as a, as a little boy. And, and so it was, it was a great way to grow up, and gave me a lot of opportunities to, to familiarize myself with the, the wild, you know, the natural native, wild creatures that exist in this part of Texas.

**David Todd** [00:04:20] Well, And you say you said that your dad was the foreman of this large ranch. Were there experiences that you had with him where he might have introduced you to, you know, whether it was livestock or wildlife?

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:04:36] Well, you know, my dad was, you know, grew up during the Depression. He was born in 1918. So his main, what, what was important to him was work. You know, it was constant - constantly working cattle or fixing fences and such.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:04:54] And but I had this, I don't know, this curiosity. I mean, I was interested in paleontology, archeology, the natural history of various species, wildlife species, in the area. So, I was constantly horseback or on foot, when I wasn't working, and in the field, digging up bison bones, mammoth bones and hunting all the time.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:05:23] And dad and mom, both, kind of wondered, you know, where I came from.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:05:29] But, but of course, I guess I got a lot of that from my mom's father because he was a, he was quite the hunter and adventurer during his early years.

**David Todd** [00:05:42] Well, that's intriguing. And I know sometimes traits do skip a generation. Maybe you can tell us just a little bit about your grandfather on your mother's side?

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:05:53] Well, yeah, he was a rounder. My mother didn't tell us things until, till we were we were older, and after grandpa, my grandfather, passed away. But he just probably wasn't one of the grandest fathers. I mean, he moonshined, made moonshine whiskey, during the Prohibition. And, and basically they ate wild game for food. Actually lived in a dugout in Knox County. And it was a pretty tough life. Mom, mom resented the life she had growing, in growing up. She said he could have done better.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:06:32] But he treated us grandchildren very well and took us fishing and hunting with him. And I just have good memories of my grandfather. But my mom seems to have, seems to have had, a different different view of things, as you can imagine.

**David Todd** [00:06:52] Yeah, I guess it doesn't resonate with everybody. Well, now, did you have any people your own age when you were growing up who might have been interested in this stuff and joined with you?

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:07:09] Yes, actually, my brother and I hunted together a lot growing up. He's three years younger. And then I had a couple of friends in high school, grade school and high school, that were also interested in paleontology. I just had a varied interest, I mean, I collected stamps. I collected coins, collected, you know, rocks, fossils.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:07:38] And some of, a couple of these guys, were right in line with me. One was George Dobie, and he lived in Benjamin until about his sophomore year, I believe. And then they moved. His dad was a county agent and they moved down to near Houston.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:07:55] And so we all kind of rummaged around in the hills and dug up fossils and just had, you know, had a good time of it.

**David Todd** [00:08:06] Wow. Sounds pretty idyllic for somebody who's curious about the outdoors.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:08:14] Actually, I might add. I might add something, David. What really got me interested in paleontology was, was, I believe when I was in eighth grade, there was a paleontologist, Dr. E.C. Olson. And if you mention that name to any paleontologist today, they will absolutely stop and just look at you. They they can't believe you even know the name. But he was the, more or less, Einstein of paleontology. And he was doing a major excavation here in Knox County of a 200 million year old lizard, a reptile. And he came to our eighth grade class and gave a speech one day, gave a presentation about what they were doing.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:09:01] And and I actually got his, somehow, I can't recall how, but I obtained his address in Chicago, Illinois, He worked at the University of Chicago, and I would send him specimens and he would write back every time I sent him a bone, whether it was a fragment, whether it was a, it was a extinct horse tooth, mammoth bones. He would reply to an eighth and ninth grade child, young boy, and tell me what I found. And I found this really interesting.

**David Todd** [00:09:42] Well and so nice that he took you seriously and I guess was trying to encourage you and appreciate what you were doing.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:09:50] He did. And, and, did you know that they, some, a couple of professors at Tech were, I don't recall their names, one of them was doing a biography paper, a biographical sketch of his life after he passed away. He actually was in Berkeley, California, when he passed away. And we were having lunch one day. And he said, "E.C. Olson." And I said, "Dr. E.C. Olson, the paleontologist?" He said, "Yes, I'm doing a biographical sketch on his life right now. And I found your letters in his files from the early sixties."

**David Todd** [00:10:32] Oh boy.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:10:32] He kept a young boy's letters. Now that says so much about the man.

**David Todd** [00:10:42] Yes. That he respected you. And not everybody offers that to a young person. Isn't that nice.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:10:51] Yeah, that's, that was incredible.

**David Todd** [00:10:53] Well, you mentioned Tech and that. That makes me think about your schooling.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:10:58] Mm hmm.

**David Todd** [00:10:58] And I was wondering if if you had any teachers or classmates either, you know, in your school in Knox County, or once you went to Texas Tech for college.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:11:12] Mm hmm. Well, of course, I was in wildlife management, wildlife biology, and I was kind of a, oh, an unusual student in that my interest was in, I wanted to be in the field all the time. I mean, I wasn't really an academic, academically oriented person. I mean, I got my degree and all, but my main interest was being in the field as a field biologist.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:11:44] And while there, I actually initiated a study, a self-imposed study on the dietary habits of coyote on the rolling plains of Texas. For a full year, I eviscerated coyotes that I'd shot and, and analyzed their stomach content and feces content and documented this. And when I presented it to my major professor, Dr. Darrell Ueckert, and another professor, Jerran T. Flinders, they said we, we're going to get you a grant. So they did. And I got a scientific grant to study for another year.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:12:26] And then we published the results in the Journal of Range Management in January of 1975. And that was the first coyote research ever conducted at Texas Tech, and it was by an undergraduate.

**David Todd** [00:12:42] That's amazing. Well, I'd definitely like to hear about your work with the coyote. I know that you had a part of your life, as you said, at Texas Tech and then later as a predator control agent. And I thought that I believe you wrote a book as well about the coyote.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:13:02] I did.

**David Todd** [00:13:02] So definitely something we should touch on.

**David Todd** [00:13:06] But let's let's hold that for a little bit later, if you don't mind.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:13:09] Sure. Sure.

**David Todd** [00:13:10] So while you were at Tech or before, were you doing any wildlife photography, or does that begin later?

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:13:21] No, actually, I became interested in photography when I was about 12 years of age, and my mother was the photographer of the family. She had a couple of cameras, old Kodak, you know, 120s. And I asked her one day if I could have a camera and she gave me a Kodaflex or something like that. And shot 120 film and I would stick some black and white in it for, you know, 12 exposures to a roll. And I might be a year in shooting the images, you know, finishing up the roll.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:13:54] But I was disenchanted with the camera because I, I had a tendency to want to really move in close to my subjects, and it wouldn't focus in that manner. And so I lost interest.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:14:08] And so, once I was at Texas Tech and we became involved in the research project. Dr. Darrell Ueckert intimated to me that he wanted me to document some of my activities afield, so he loaned me an old Argus 35 millimeter and all the film I needed to shoot, which was Kodachrome 64 and 25.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:14:35] And once I had that camera in my hands, I realized how much I had missed photography and that it was achieving the results that I had sought whenever my mom gave me the old 120 several years before. And that's what really lit the fire of photography in me.

**David Todd** [00:14:57] That's interesting. So sometimes photography really depends on having a good eye and interest, but also in having the right equipment.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:15:05] Very much so. And that camera allowed me to move in close and of course it didn't have a telephoto - it was a fixed lens. But, I was actually able to do sort of semi-macro work. And, and I, I really started sort of exploring a little bit with the, with the camera, like on action shots and things. I still have some of the old Kodachrome slides.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:15:31] And then once I had to give the camera back, well, I immediately went down on 34th Street at Plains Camera and purchased an old Canon TL, because I couldn't imagine being without a, without a camera after using that, that Argus for that, for that year.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:15:47] And so, that's, that's what really kind of got me got me going in it. And then once I graduated.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:15:55] Go ahead.

**David Todd** [00:15:56] No, no. I just say it's interesting how, you know, the camera became your companion.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:16:02] Yes, it did. After I graduated from Tech, then I spent five or three winters out in an old dugout on the Pitchfork Ranch, and I trapped coyotes and bobcats for a

living, just because of the adventure. I wanted, I wanted, I was sick of school. You know, been going to school since I was six years old. And, and I just want to just break loose and just do something that was close to my heart, which was actually just a great adventure. I didn't know if I could make a living at it, but I did.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:16:38] And at the same time, I was working on my photography, and I was able to afford some rather expensive lenses and then upgraded cameras. And those were the steps that led me led me to where I am today.

**David Todd** [00:16:55] So you mentioned taking photographs, but I was curious if there were any photographs or videos or TV shows or movies or other kinds of images that you might have seen growing up that were influential for you, that got you excited about, not just wildlife, but also about the photographic field?

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:17:24] Sure. Actually, it was after I really got, became interested in photography that I started noticing other photographers, such as Ernest Haas. He was a German photographer, but he lived in New York City, and he documented the Four Corners region of the United States very early in the, in the 1950s, and using Kodachrome.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:17:52] And I was fascinated with, with the light and the color. He had a tremendous eye for color and light, and that was a big influence on the way that I shot, eventually viewed, you know, great light.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:18:09] And of course, there were some of the old photographers from the, Margaret Bourke-White, from the Depression years, who documented the Depression. I always appreciated her work and the way she saw her subject matter, and presented it to the viewers.

**David Todd** [00:18:29] So part of it was, I mean, when I think about Haas, I think about landscape...

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:18:35] Yes.

**David Todd** [00:18:35] But then it's more about maybe the people who are trying to eke out a living during the Depression. Are you interested in both?

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:18:47] Oh, yeah. I love to shoot people. I've shot a lot, more so in black and white. So back in the, in the eighties, actually in the seventies, in 1976, I was asked by an older lady here in Benjamin, if I would document these old cowboys that were still alive in the region. They were in their eighties in 1976. And so I was into black and white at the time. And so I went around to these, these old gentlemen, and ladies, and photographed each one of them. And to this day, some of those images really resonate. They're some of my favorite images of people that I've ever, that I've ever created.

**David Todd** [00:19:36] Well, and I guess those weren't just pictures of individuals, but it was also capturing a kind of a history of an era that was slipping away.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:19:45] Yes. Yes, absolutely. And that's what this lady wanted. She said, "I want, I want you to document the faces of these, these older men before they're all gone." And so I had a list and I went to each one of them, and all of them were very kind and allowed me to do so. And it was all existing light, window light. So it was, it was just very natural in

their, in their living rooms, in a barn, you know, where they were working. And so it was a it was a lot of fun.

**David Todd** [00:20:19] Well, so if you, if you described your early days with a camera, would you think of yourself as self-taught, or was there anybody who was giving you some tips and pointers?

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:20:30] No, I was self taught. It was real funny. See, I lived ... At the time, there were no significant photographers in my immediate area, except for wedding photographers and, you know, party photographers and that type of thing. And I had no interest in that. And so I would just study the magazines, and saw what, what level of work that the magazines were accepting and sort of shot for that.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:21:06] And I would talk to magazine editors in New York, and I asked them, you know, if, what they expected out of me. And they gave me suggestions, you know, of the type of imagery to be submitting.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:21:21] And, you know, I started working with the magazine market in the late seventies and hit the national markets in 19 ..., well, actually in 1979, I believe, with National Wildlife and actually with Texas Parks and Wildlife simultaneously, and then started working with the big three magazines in New York - Field and Stream, Outdoor Life, and Sports Afield. And eventually, oh golly, I had about 50 covers with these big national names in the 1980s, during that 1980 period.

**David Todd** [00:21:59] Just writing this down.

**David Todd** [00:22:02] Well, so some of your subjects, I gather, included landscapes in the Panhandle, some of the great ranches up there, the JA, the Mallet, the Pitchfork.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:22:17] Yes, sir.

**David Todd** [00:22:17] I guess the East Foundation, which is more in South Texas. Is that right?

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:22:21] Yes, that's down below Hebbronville. That's a, that was a 150,000-acre ranch that I was, I was commissioned to go down and document everything. It was a ... I need to step back a moment. Robert East, it was the old Robert East Ranch, and he passed away, and left that ranch to, to the foundation. And so Neil Wilkins, Dr. Neil Wilkins, who is the CEO, contacted me and asked if I would come down after my name was suggested to him by David Langford, a good friend of mine who was also a photographer, to come down and document all aspects of this ranch because it was like stepping into a time capsule.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:23:10] Robert was not a, a what you'd call a very progressive in his work style. And so when you stepped onto that ranch, everything was like stepping back, you know, 70 years.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:23:29] And so, they wanted me to document everything about that ranch before they started changing things: old stock, old pens, gates, wildlife, insects, reptiles, everything. And even the wowboys working, because all these men worked for Mr. East.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:23:50] And so I spent three years going down every month except for July because it was just too hot to be down there - every year, every month of each year. And then after I had attained or collected this many I mean, thousands of images, they, Neil Wilkins asked if we were interested in maybe completing a book on the project and my wife and I said, "You bet." So we published the book on the San Antonio Viejo: Horses to Ride, Cattle to Cut - The San Antonio Viejo Ranch of Texas.

**David Todd** [00:24:31] Mm hmm. And then I gather you've also taken photographs on other really significant and historic ranches - the Pitchfork?

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:24:42] Yes.

**David Todd** [00:24:43] Which I gather you grew up near, so.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:24:45] Yes. The four sixes. Yeah, actually, I, I was, I lived on the Pitchfork, and I did some photography there, but not a whole lot.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:24:57] But I did another, I created another book with Henry Chappell on the Four Sixes Ranch. And then we also collaborated on the book on the Wagner Ranch. And and then I also created a book on the Waggoner Ranch of Wyoming and spent parts of four years in Wyoming shooting that particular book.

**David Todd** [00:25:24] And so when you go to these ranches, how do you sort of plot out how you're going to document a place that may be really vast and has a deep history?

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:25:34] It's not easy. Say, for instance, the Four Sixes was probably a little easier because Anne Marion, who has since passed, she wanted me to just document the daily work on this ranch, and also the beautiful aspects there with the landscape and skies and the weather patterns and such, and some architectural imagery.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:25:58] The Waggoner was different. I mean, it was 525,000 acres and it was kind of the same thing. But when you step on to a ranch of 500,000 acres, and was guided around for a couple of days, then handed the key and said, "Go to it." Believe me, that's not easy.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:26:22] And so, I made friends with all the cowboys and, and had them to, to let me know when, when significant work projects were about to begin. And in between the work projects, I just shot wildlife and landscape, and they would point out historical locations like, oh, boulders that had etchings in them of cowboys dating back to the 1920s. And I would document that. Old dugouts, old dipping vats. And it was just a, it was a monumental project. It was really, really a big deal.

**David Todd** [00:27:02] Would you have a guide that would show you around like somebody who'd been there for a while?

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:27:06] No. When I first went on the ranch for about two days, there was a gentleman that, that showed me the ranch. And then after that, I was on my own. And you cannot cover 500,000 acres in two days. And so they gave me a map of the ranch. It had 1400 miles of dirt roads. And they just gave me a map of the ranch and I just explored. I mean, I stayed lost much of the time at the very beginning. I would I call my wife on the mobile phone,



say, "I'll be home after a while. Right now, I don't know where I am, but I'll eventually hit a main road and get out of here."

**David Todd** [00:27:49] That's great. Well, and was part of this trying to see the seasonal cycles on a big place like that?

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:28:00] Yes. Now, of course, when you get off like on the Waggoner, it's, it's a vast landholding, but it doesn't have a lot of autumn color like you would see, like, say, in the Panhandle of Texas, along the Canadian River or along the Brazos here in the rolling plains. And so there wasn't really a lot of color to contrast, you know, to have a lot of contrast to show the different seasonal changes. But it was there and you tried to, in macro locations, and so I would focus on those, on those spots to to give me a little bit of color in say changes of summer to fall, and fall to winter. And of course, you'd get snow and I would get snow images in the dead of winter like we're getting, as of probably tomorrow, here.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:28:52] And so it was a, it was a grand project. I thoroughly enjoyed it. I spent five years out there shooting on that ranch and enjoyed every moment of it, as I did for the Four Sixes, as I did the San Antonio Viejo.

**David Todd** [00:29:08] Well, so you told us a little bit about how you you take these photos or at least you know how you site them. But can you can you talk a little bit about the, you know, the equipment that you're using, and sort of the technical aspect to this?

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:29:23] Well, uh, say, for instance, if you're working cattle, there's just a certain two lenses basically you use - you use the wide angle lens and a short telephoto lens because you're working, you're trying to get imagery of the cattle and the cowboys, all as one collection. And then whenever the cowboys are actually branding, then you move in tight with a short telephoto and try to isolate the cowboys doing their work.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:29:58] How I wish I would have had a drone when I was, when I was working on these ranches. I could have gotten so much more imagery showing, you know, the landscape from, you know, from, say, 20 feet high or 50 feet high. But that was before the advent of drones. And of course, now I have three drones. And whenever I go to a ranch, I can hit all angles. I can go above and shoot down on the cowboys working. I can be on the ground shooting. It's just the drones have really opened up a whole new avenue for me.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:30:36] And I'm about to start working to document the largest ranch in Arizona, this spring - the Diamond A. And I'll be working a lot of drone, doing a lot of drone work up there on that, on that particular ranch.

**David Todd** [00:30:56] That's great. Something to look forward to for sure.

**David Todd** [00:30:59] Well, and so, after you, I guess, have been on these shoots for, you know, three, four or five years, I guess the next step is, is to try to cull them. And I was wondering, you know, when you've got, I imagine, thousands of images, what are you looking for?

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:31:20] Yeah, of course. You know, you're looking for great light. You're looking for the best composition and also the image, sort of a multi-level. The image has to show, has to really speak. The cowboys working - say, for instance, just an example - if you're shooting a branding scene, you know, branding scenes are a dime a dozen. You know, you

walk up and you shoot and the brander is branding and the cowboy's boots are there. And I would also try to shoot say beneath a horse to show the cowboys actually lifting this, you know, 300-pound calf off the ground with dirt flying.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:32:04] So I wanted to document all the action and the dirtiness, the filth, the smoke, everything that defined the work of the cowboy today, and probably as it was in the last 100 years. And so, that's, that's the angle that I, that I would take in shooting the ranch work.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:32:26] And also encompassing the landscape, the, you know, the landscape. Say, for instance, if the, if it was a really big open country, I would try to get on an elevated location and shoot an overview of the cowboys bringing the cattle to the pens to work, with this immense landscape behind the cowboys, and to show the immensity of the land, you know, what they call the Big Empty?

**David Todd** [00:32:57] Yeah. You know, it's it's interesting to me that, how can I put this, so I imagine on a ranch, there are moments of great quiet and stillness and almost isolation. But then there's also, you know, like you're talking about, you know, working or branding. And it's, it's a lot of activity. And and I was curious if you ever shot movies or video.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:33:30] From the drone, yes. I've shot a lot of drone, drone video clips, especially on the Four Sixes. I've got an extensive collection of drone footage, video footage, some very interesting The beauty about that drone is that, is that it can be 20 degrees and the wind blowing, and I could be sitting in my pickup with the heater on, listening to the radio and working my drone that's a half mile away and right up against the cowboys, showing them working cattle.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:34:14] And that is fantastic, believe me, because I have done my share of being freezing, basically almost to death at times. And that's the beauty of using a drone. You can be following a line of say, ten or 15 cowboys that's heading into the rising sun early in the morning and fly the drone right alongside of them and get all that action. And it's just absolutely beautiful.

**David Todd** [00:34:45] Well, you know, maybe it would help to understand more about your art by talking about a particular project. You told us about the 6666 and the Waggoner and, but maybe you can talk a little bit about the situation at the JA Ranch and you know, gathering, the cows - what am I saying - the bison there.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:35:10] Uh huh.

**David Todd** [00:35:10] In this effort to move them to the Caprock Canyons State Park, and, which I guess was a whole story that you produced for the Southern Plains Bison book with Andy Sansom. Can you sort of reel back the years and tell us about how that project came about?

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:35:33] You bet. I believe it was in 1997, I was giving a presentation in Dallas, and Andy Sansom was there, and he and I had already worked on a couple of book projects together, and he was attending this presentation I was giving at the Safari Club. And he came out after I had finished and he said, "We are fixing to, we're about to initiate the capture of the last southern Plains bison on the JA Ranch, and would you like to be the documenting photographer?" And I said, "Yes, I would." He said, "You got it."

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:36:13] And so I was the only non Texas Parks and Wildlife person, employee, that was, that was really allowed on this project other than one or two of the cowboys that helped locate the bison when we were actually involved in the capture process. And so I spent probably a total of two weeks beginning with the very first day whenever we darted two or three bison and found out how lethal that carfentanyl is. It's the sedative that, that was used to to drop these bison. And it's like 10,000 times more powerful than morphine.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:37:02] And so we found out very quickly that that you only needed to down one bison at a time, because if you got down a couple of them, there wouldn't be enough time to, you know, to put them in a position where they wouldn't suffocate.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:37:20] And so, [excuse me] the first day was rather chaotic, but after that, we established a routine. And I rode in the back of the pickup with the dart man, and we would approach the bison herd. And, but it was only a short period of time before these bison realized that we were actually after them. And when that, when that point was, at that point, the bison, they took off and we had to use an aircraft to locate them. And the last bison that, that were actually captured, golly, I think it took a total of four months to capture like 28 bison.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:38:07] It was a, it was an incredible, incredible feat. And, and all of the biologists, all the Parks and Wildlife employees - they very energetic. Everybody got really involved in it. And it was a lot of teamwork to, to finally pull it all together and to bring take all the bison and transfer, transport them to Caprock Canyons State Park.

**David Todd** [00:38:32] Well, and just so we can kind of set the scene, these, these bison were on the this historic JA Ranch. I gather Mr. Adair was was one of Charles Goodnight's partners back in the 19th century?

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:38:47] Yes, I believe that's correct.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:38:49] And the bison, didn't, they, they were not restricted to the JA because they would just walk over any fence. I mean, they, their, their technique of, of transversing the land was, was just to jump on top of the fence and crush it. And you would see them over on adjoining ranches.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:39:09] And so the Parks and Wildlife actually hired a cowboy months ahead of time to, to start feeding these bison to where they would come to a pickup.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:39:20] But as I previously mentioned, it didn't take but a few days for the bison to realize. I mean, they were they were actually, you know, sort of like, wild whitetail, but had become accustomed to people. But as wild animals will do, it's easy for them to to reverse back to the wild - overnight, basically. And once they, they learn to distrust you, I mean, they immediately revert back to, to their wild habits. And they, they took to the rough country rather quickly.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:39:56] And so they had to employ aircraft - helicopter, fixed-wing - to finally locate the last, the last bison that were captured.

**David Todd** [00:40:07] And so do you know much about why it was that the, the JA wanted to get rid of this pretty iconic herd? You know, it wasn't like they were doing nice things to their fences, but...

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:40:22] Yeah, yeah. Well, that didn't that didn't help things. It didn't help the relationship between bison and the owners.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:40:31] They just, they basically, they were tearing fences down and just going everywhere and they wanted them out.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:40:39] And so Parks and Wildlife realized, Andy especially, I mean, he was the one that was the initiator of the project and he realized the significance of the southern plains bison that once numbered in almost a half a million in the mid-1870s, or actually the early 1870s. And in a period of four years, they were, they were shot down and killed down to only a few hundred.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:41:12] And thanks to Charles Goodnight (actually, his wife, I think, was a big impetus behind his capturing those bison), those last few wild southern plain bison, and protecting them on his ranch.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:41:26] And so whenever they were, we captured them, we took them to a central processing area, which was a portable pens that we set up, or they set up, out in the middle of the pasture, and they took blood samples, hair samples and sent them to Texas A&M to determine just how pure their genetic, the genetic code was. And anything that was, that was obviously impure was separated from what they considered the more pure southern plain bison. And only those bison were the ones transported to Caprock Canyon State Park.

**David Todd** [00:42:05] I see. That's interesting. So they knew that there was some hybridization that had happened in years past and they were trying to get it down to something that was as purely southern plains bison as possible.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:42:19] Yes.

**David Todd** [00:42:19] Well, that's interesting.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:42:21] Absolutely. It was, it was a, it was a real experience, because once you gave an antidote to the, once you had the bison actually pulled into a chute and then loaded onto the trailer, then you gave them an antidote and they were like within seconds they were up. And when they were unloaded into those pens, you were not allowed on the ground anywhere around those bison. You walked on a catwalk because they would come rushing into the pens. And if they saw anything, even a water bucket, they would run and just hook that thing and just toss it into the air.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:43:01] I mean, these, these, these mammals were truly wild creatures. And that that having been captured and penned just, just brought brought out the, the true wildness. I guess the genetic code that has been there for 10,000 years came out in them. And boy, they were, they were rough characters.

**David Todd** [00:43:32] So let's see: you've sort of taken us through finding these animals and then capturing them. How were they penned? It sounds like they were pretty wild and elusive animals.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:43:48] Well, you didn't pen them. You actually took them to the processing area after they had been anesthetized, I guess you could call it. I guess I'm pronouncing that correctly. Whenever they were injected with this carfentanyl that was shot from a dart gun.

**David Todd** [00:44:08] I see.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:44:10] Yeah. Yeah.

**David Todd** [00:44:12] I follow you now.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:44:12] Yeah, we were given, actually, and going back a little bit, just, just retracing some steps here. We had to attend, even, even I as a photographer, for me as a photographer, I had to attend with a biologist a three-day course in handling carfentanyl. It is so dangerous that one draw on your skin will kill you. It takes about 30 minutes for you to, to die with one drop of carfentanyl on your skin. And so we had to be, we had to be trained how to handle these bison after they had been subdued with this carfentanyl.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:44:53] And so, and the, the biologist - I don't recall his name now, I think he's deceased - but every morning he would go into a room by himself wearing a safety helmet with a glass shield and with rubber gloves. And he would load a X number of darts that he figured he would use that day. And, and I would go in that room - on two occasions, I went in with him and photographed him actually loading those darts with carfentanyl. Otherwise, no one was allowed in the room with him.

**David Todd** [00:45:39] I see. So, these animals were darted in the field, in the wild. And then while they were anesthetized, they were put in a pen or they were put in a trailer. What was the next step?

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:45:52] Yes, they had to be loaded in a trailer while they were actually unconscious, so to speak. And then, and then once they were in the trailer, you had to pull them in with another, with a separate pickup. And then once they were in the trailer, then you injected them with an antidote. And then within moments, they were on their feet. And then they were transported to a central processing pens on the ranch.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:46:19] And then, from there, well, they stayed there at that processing location until it was determined if they were pure southern plains bison, or they were a mixed breed. And they were separated to, into the two different categories, and then they were transported. Those purebred were transported actually to the Park, and released.

**David Todd** [00:46:48] Hmm. And while they had them in this these processing pens, did they do anything else? Did they vaccinate them or brand them?

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:46:56] Uh, yeah. Yeah. Let's see. Let me see. I know they, they branded them. Yes. Yes, actually, they did. They put ear tags in them because I recall photographing all the ear-tagging process.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:47:14] And, and it seems like they branded them. But yes, they did, because they're branded with the "TX" brand, I believe, Texas, TX.

**David Todd** [00:47:26] The Texas state herd.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:47:27] Yes. Texas state herd. Yes.

**David Todd** [00:47:29] Isn't that something. And were they vaccinated against brucellosis or anything?

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:47:36] Yes, they were vaccinated. Everything was, was preventative measures were employed on-site, and then they were transported to the Caprock Canyons.

**David Todd** [00:47:47] I see. And then. So bring us up to the stage where they they're, they're being trucked to the Caprock Canyons State Park, I guess. And then were they sort of acclimated there or they just let go right away?

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:48:02] Well, they actually had had constructed a huge, I guess you could call it a pen. It's actually a pasture, that was constructed out of metal poles and cables, that could possibly withstand the impact of a bison running into it. And they were released in that area where they became acclimated.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:48:33] And then in time, which now they're they just released out into the park and they just kind of stay within the boundaries of the park, even with barbed wire fences.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:48:43] But, but when they were still just after being transported and processed, they had to stay in this, in this, almost look like Jurassic Park type of a setting, environment.

**David Todd** [00:48:59] Jurassic Park. So do you think that they're I've seen, you know, domestic herds of bison that are on ranches where they seem pretty docile. Do you think that these, these animals that you were helping with at the JA and then later at Caprock were somehow more wild?

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:49:25] Oh, absolutely. Whenever they were captured, they were, they were wild animals. I mean, it was ... they were, they had been, they had been left to their own devices for, you know, since the 1800s, or their ancestors. And then once they, whenever the calves were born. Well, that was, that was, that process, that wild learned process was passed on and and these animals were wild.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:49:54] I remember the first time I photographed them, the very first time, we flew in in a helicopter and located these bison miles from headquarters. And then landed a half a mile away. And I had to hike in and stalk these animals, in in order to get a photograph with a 500 millimeter lens. And then once they realized I was there, they took off running and went into the canyons and we took the helicopter and went back to try to find them. And we couldn't even find them again.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:50:29] It's like once they had realized that we were after them, they were like white-tailed deer. They disappeared.

**David Todd** [00:50:38] So when you were taking these photographs, what were you trying to capture? I mean, it sounds like there were lots and lots of aspects of this, and it was happening fast and it's kind of a one-off deal. Not every time do you manage to see this happening.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:50:52] Yeah, well ...

**David Todd** [00:50:52] What were you trying to capture?

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:50:54] Well, initially, I just wanted to get the herd in its natural setting, and that's the reason we flew in a chopper to find them. And, and then once the work process started, then I was documenting the actual capture process. I wanted to have, I wanted to document the capture of the last southern plains bison in existence. And, and so it was everything from the darting process to the loading of the darts, to the darting process, to the training, to the biologists sitting around and visiting, and pickups in the field, and glassing for bison early in the morning, the entire, everything that, that we had to do in order to, to capture these bison, and transfer them to the Caprock Canyons - I wanted documented on film.

**David Todd** [00:51:52] Yeah, well, an historic thing.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:51:57] Well, and when you think back about this, this is now of almost 25 years ago. Are there other aspects to it that really stand out that are important to you about capturing and preserving this herd?

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:52:12] Well, I think it's, I think it was a, it was a very significant move on Andy's part, a very, he could see down the road, you know, that it needed to happen. I mean, it's ... so many species of animals have, have been basically exterminated. And the bison, the southern plains bison was one of them. I think there were, they estimated that 200 were left, out of three and a half to 4 million, in a matter of four or five years.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:52:44] And so this was absolutely significant to, to preserve this last vestige of this, this basically pure strain of southern plain bison. It would have been a tragedy to allow it to, to go into extinction like the passenger pigeon and so many other species of mammals and and avians.

**David Todd** [00:53:07] Well, and, you know, it seems like there have been many animals that have become rare. You know, you mentioned the passenger pigeon and there are, you know, a score of others. But do you see something as iconic about these bison and what they represent about that part of the world?

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:53:30] Oh, absolutely. They're absolutely, absolutely iconic. I mean, they represented ... well, you know, the *Bison antiquus*, dating back 10,000 years, and then, of course, down to the *Bison bison*, which, which exists today. I mean, they've been a representative part of America for over 10,000 years. Actually, I think *Bison taylori* is older than *antiquus*. They're the ones with like six-foot horn spreads. There's a skull in the Canyon museum of a *Bison taylori*, I think, that was found up in Lipscomb County.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:54:11] And so they are definitely an iconic figure representing the plains of America. And so, I think it was very farsighted, and a very wise decision by Andy Sansom to preserve what's, what is left of the southern plain basin. And for the populace to be able to see: you know, they can go to the park today.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:54:38] Of course, today, I mean, I was with some German filmmakers last year helping them with the, with the, doing a, creating a film on Texas. And a large part of

it was on the bison. And so I went and spent two or three days with them and aided them in getting some good video footage of the bison.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:55:02] And today they're just as tame is as an old milk cow, because everybody's, you know, they're around people. And so, so it's, I think it's a wonderful thing that people can see them. I mean, if they were as wild as they were on JA, nobody'd ever seen. And so now, you know, hundreds of thousands of people can drive out into the park and they'll be standing in the highway. And you can see this iconic animal that once represented food for all the Plains Indians in America dating back to the Folsom man, 10,000 years ago.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:55:41] And so, I think paleontologically and historically, the bison is, is a fantastic, is a, is a very iconic animal to both Texas as well as America, the American plains, all the way up through Montana.

**David Todd** [00:56:10] You know, one of the things I thought was, was very interesting when we first sat down to talk, and you were talking about your interest in paleontology as a young boy.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:56:25] Mm hmm.

**David Todd** [00:56:25] And then this, you know, your excavations on your own...

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:56:31] Yeah.

**David Todd** [00:56:31] And your collection of bones and and sending them to Chicago. And I'm curious if you recall, when you were working with these modern bison, if there were any run-ins that you had with the remains of *Bison antiquus* or what was the other that you mentioned?

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:56:55] Oh, *taylori*.

**David Todd** [00:56:57] *Taylori*, yes.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:57:01] Well, I mean, I've never, I've never actually excavated a *Bison antiquus* skull. I have, I've excavated bison skulls, probably hundreds of years old, possibly thousands. But they were *Bison bison*, that would be, you know, probably within the last couple of thousand years or more than that. I think I think *Bison antiquus*, I don't know exactly whenever they finally went into extinction. But, but I have found numerous bison skulls since basically back in the sixties.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:57:42] It seemed like that was a period of time whenever erosion actually revealed a layer, a level of paleontology that, where I could go out and find these things. I have not found any bison bones since, since the sixties, maybe fragments. But back in the sixties, I could, I could quite often find bison skulls. They were always embedded in creek banks and in cliff facings, which told me that they were very old because some of these were like 20 feet up in a gravel bed, which indicates thousands upon thousands of years ago.

**David Todd** [00:58:29] And how would you spot them?

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:58:32] Just walking, walking in the hills. And I've got kind of an eye for seeing fossils. And if there's any question about it, just a piece of one, well, stick it to your



tongue. If it sticks to your tongue like glue, it's a fossil. If it's a rock, and some rocks do look like fossils, it is just like sticking your tongue to rock. There's nothing to it.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:58:54] But but these, these skulls and large leg bones, jaw bones that I would find, you could actually see them protruding from creek banks and riverbanks.

**David Todd** [00:59:09] That's interesting.

**Wyman Meinzer** [00:59:11] A lot of times I found, I remember one time I was, I was on, over near the Pitchfork and I was trying to photograph a hawk's nest that was in a cliff, and I'd used a butcher knife to cut footholds in this cliff where I could get to a point where I could actually see the nest. And at the same time, it was like a, say, the spine of an ancient lizard, you know, this cliff, it was just really narrow. And I could see over to the other side and down in a wash, I saw a bison skull lying there, and it had been washed out of the bank. And I crawled back down and, and put it in my pickup and took it home. I still have it today.

**David Todd** [00:59:56] That's great. Do you think that any of these bison remains were in a central area where maybe the Native Americans ran them off a cliff, or was this more random and scattered?

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:00:13] Yeah, this was more random. Here in Rolling Plains, there's really not any locations where archaic man drove them off the cliffs. The only place that I have actually been to see this was at Bonfire Shelter, which is down on the the Rio Grande, actually on a tributary of the Pecos River. And, no it's not. It's actually a tributary to the Rio Grande. But I was down shooting on the Pecos, and the rancher took me to this location, and University of Texas paleontologists actually excavated it, gosh, I think probably back in the sixties or seventies.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:00:58] And there were literally hundreds of the, remains of hundreds of bison. The bones were piled up in front of this cliff. And there was an overhang. And the Native Americans of that, of that period, which I think dates back probably to archaic (I don't think it was paleo), where they would butcher these animals, and spontaneous combustion occurred and the skeletons, the carcasses of these animals caught on fire. And that's the reason it's called Bonfire Shelter. You can actually look that up in scientific journals.

**David Todd** [01:01:44] Isn't that something. And so they had run these animals off the cliff to, to kill them. And then they'd come back in ..

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:01:50] And butcher them.

**David Todd** [01:01:52] Yeah, I guess, pull the hides off and get the loins and tongues.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:01:57] And, yes, and, and the paleontologists actually excavated down to about 30 feet and, and surprisingly, they found evidence of Clovis points, of Clovis habitation, at like 30 feet down. So this, this cliff, and it was, it's not real high. It's probably not over 20 feet high. But you take an animal weighing 1,000 pounds fall 20 feet. Well, he's, he's pretty well, you know, out of business as far as mobility.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:02:32] And so apparently, Clovis people drove mammoth and Bison antiquus over these cliffs. And Folsom, the Folsom people as well.

**David Todd** [01:02:46] That's amazing to be witness to something: you could almost see it in your mind's eye, what would have happened thousands of years ago. You just see the evidence.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:02:56] Oh it's fascinating. It is fascinating.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:02:57] And you can, you can see this jump from the highway, from Del Rio over to ... what's the little town that Judge Roy Bean was in? Oh, shoot. Anyway, where Judge Roy Bean had his, had his little office, just before you get to that, that little village, you can actually see the undulating landscape where they would drive these bison. And whenever they came up over this last undulation, there was no turning back. They suddenly came to this cliff. And they couldn't, they couldn't turn back. They were driven over the edge. It was a perfect ambush.

**David Todd** [01:03:49] So I have a question for you, and it is something I know very little about, but maybe you can fill me in. I've read some that suggested that bison in ancient days, maybe this is in the years of the *Bison antiquus*, maybe, that early man came in and took out many of the herbivores that were on the, on the plains.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:04:23] Mm hmm.

**David Todd** [01:04:23] The horse and the camel, maybe the, I guess there were sloths. And that what was left was the bison. And the bison didn't have the sort of competition for grazing. And so they, they grew to be this dominant animal on the plains.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:04:45] Yeah.

**David Todd** [01:04:46] You know, when Western settlers came, they would see tens of millions over the stretch of that area..

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:04:53] Yes.

**David Todd** [01:04:53] From Mexico to Canada. Is there truth to that? It sounds like you've been interested in sort of these big historical epochs.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:05:00] Yeah, you know, I don't. I really don't. I mean, the sloth and and the camels. I mean, I've found camel bones, and I've found rhinoceros, ancient rhinoceros bones, according to paleontologists that saw these, these locations that I took them to. But I don't know how much impact they had on the, the spread of the bison on the plains. But, I just, you know, that's, that's a question I really can't answer. I don't, I don't know what impact that these other animals had on the, on the population density and the spread of the bison on the plains.

**David Todd** [01:05:44] I see. Okay.

**David Todd** [01:05:46] Well, is there anything else while we're just talking about bison, you know, in the intervening years between Charles Goodnight, and I guess his wife, Molly, were able to capture those animals.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:06:04] Uh huh.

**David Todd** [01:06:04] Bison have managed to restore themselves to, I guess, several hundred thousand animals now, a far cry from what was there in the 1880s.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:06:15] Right.

**David Todd** [01:06:15] Have you been tracking these these modern bison herds? Is that something that interests you beyond what's at Caprock Canyons?

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:06:23] Not really. I mean, I've been up in South Dakota and and have seen the bison; have viewed the bison there in Montana and Yellowstone, in that region. But as far as, once I, once I'd documented the capture of the southern plains bison, I mean, I've always had an interest and I will will always have an interest, but as far as really getting into, you know, their natural history, now, it's, you know, I'm kind of on to other things.

**David Todd** [01:06:56] Well, there is lots to do. It sounds like you've got many plans.

**David Todd** [01:07:01] Let me go back to one other book and project that you've worked on, which I thought was really interesting. And it seems like it it ties together your life while you were at Texas Tech, and then a book that you worked on in 1996. And that's the story of the coyote ...

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:07:22] Yes.

**David Todd** [01:07:22] Which I think is is a nuisance and a menace for a lot of livestock raisers, but then an extraordinarily clever animal with an interesting natural history, it sounds like. Can you tell us a little bit about, you know, your interests in coyotes over the years?

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:07:44] Sure.

**David Todd** [01:07:45] From those early days of predator control and studying them at Texas Tech?

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:07:50] Yeah, I actually had a fascination and developed a fascination with the coyotes when I was just a young boy.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:07:59] I mean, golly, I remember going out with my father, my brother, my mom, and and I would go out, like on Sunday nights and just go hunt coyotes. And Daddy... I was just totally fascinated with them. Listen to them howl at night. And for some reason I just developed this insatiable appetite to, to learn as much as I could about coyotes. I don't know where it came from. I really don't. I mean, I'm I'm interested in a lot of different species of, of creatures, native creatures. I don't, I'm not into exotics, any.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:08:39] But the coyote is especially important to me. Having been raised on a ranch, I probably have a little more insight than a lot of people do about coyote behavior, and also because of the research that was conducted in the seventies.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:08:57] And there's a lot of misconception about the, a lot of misconceptions about the coyote and their role as a predator on livestock. Sheep and goats - yes, they are, definitely. But as far as being a real menace to cattle, it's very sporadic. And it's generally only, only a very few animals. It's like, it's like you and I. It's like, you know, you, me and 10,000 other people in Austin are going to go out and we're going to do things right. But

you're going to have three or four, that's going to, that are criminals. And it's the same way with in the predator population. And you've got to remove those three or four.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:09:43] But, coyotes, over the years, have, you know, people just kind of have this misconception that every coyote is a bad coyote, which is so untrue.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:09:57] And, and I wanted in that book to, to really tell the story of the coyote. And, and it was a, it was a really popular book.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:10:08] I just finished a book that's just out in December. And it's called, "The Art of Predator Calling: A Portrait in Tradition". And that book has sold like, like, unbelievable - I think like 1300 copies in, like a month. And it's a big coffee table book - 200 pages, 120 images.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:10:30] And today I don't hunt coyotes very much at all except to maintain my journals. I have kept natural history journal on coyotes for the last 40 or 50 years. And, and if I don't harvest, you know, 15 or 20 or 25 in a, in a year, my journals will die. You know, there'll be a, there'll be a window of time whenever there's nothing there. And so each year I will go out and try to to harvest a few and then take measurements, take weight, body weights, and document body condition and, and enter those into my journals.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:11:19] And then the rest of the time, all I do is photograph coyotes. Now I'd much rather photograph them than shoot them - much rather.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:11:27] And what's something, David, that's really interesting, and I'm so glad that I've kept this journal, is that in the seventies, an average coyote would weigh about 24 pounds - a male. And today, according to my journals, the average male is going to exceed over thirty pounds. That's in a period of like 40-plus years. They have gotten larger, heavier.

**David Todd** [01:12:02] What do you speculate is the reason?

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:12:04] I attribute I attribute it to a couple of things. The influx of wild hogs. They are a big predator in wild hogs, on young pigs. And in the 1970s and late 1970s, ranchers started reverting, or converting their ranches from from just exclusively cow-calf operations to, to raising yearlings, weanlings, grazing yearlings on wheat.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:12:35] And so whereas a ranch, say, for instance, right here in Benjamin would once, would once raise only like 600 cows with calves. Now, they will have that many cows, but they'll have 5 to 10,000 yearlings throughout the winter. And if you have a 1 to 2% death loss with, say, five or 10,000 yearlings, look at the poundage of beef that's available to the, to the coyotes.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:13:05] And also, also, and this is really important, the latest rage is hunting wild hogs out of helicopters. And this commercial hunting of hogs, and these guys don't don't utilize the meat. They just leave it lying there. And so you may throughout a whole winter, there will be literally thousands of hogs killed in this one or two county area.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:13:39] And so imagine how much pork is available as carrion to these coyotes. And they will clean up a wild hog in one night, a 200-pound hog. And so I think this is what's attributable to the increase in the average weight of these coyotes, and the body condition of them being improved.

**David Todd** [01:14:04] That's fascinating. That is really interesting. I'm so glad you've kept that journal going, because that must be an unusual thing to have a record that goes for 40, 50 years.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:14:15] It is. And I've actually included some of the data in my latest book. So it's not a book about killing things. It's about the art of calling, but it also includes food habit of coyotes from my research in the seventies and then some age brackets and some other scientific information, that's, it's a, it's a book that would interest both scientists as well as just the casual reader, as well as those who like to hunt.

**David Todd** [01:14:50] Well, can you give us just a sort of teasing taste of some of the techniques of calling in coyotes?

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:15:00] Like how? You mean, blowing a call?

**David Todd** [01:15:04] Yeah. Yeah. What? What kind of. Yeah. I mean, I understand that there, there are many different calls, I guess, devices and people just using their mouths, maybe.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:15:13] Yes.

**David Todd** [01:15:14] What are some of the favorite techniques that you have?

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:15:17] Well, I make, I make my own calls. I've made, I've made my, my own predator calls for, gosh, since I was a, golly, 19 or 20 years of age. And they all imitate either rodents, or rabbits and birds. And so I have probably 50 calls that I can resort to during the calling process. I usually carry about four or five around my neck when I'm calling.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:15:45] I'll probably go out day after tomorrow if we get a good snow and go out with my camera and get photographs of coyotes in snow. And I will just take four or five of these calls with different voices and put them around my neck, and then go out and sit for, say, ten or 15 minutes in one location, and then move, say, a mile and go, go find another spot that, that might be able to offer a good vantage point for a, for a good photograph. And, do that all day long.

**David Todd** [01:16:17] And is there a particular time of day or a place that you think is best to go to find coyotes?

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:16:22] Yeah, You know, it's, if you're hunting with a rifle, it's much easier to, to collect an animal than it is to photograph them. Photographing them, at least at the level that I want, you know, and get the quality of the imagery that I want, I like to be at eye-level with them. And so I'm up in a, you know, say, a juniper shrub as a backdrop, and the wind in my face, and preferably calling with them coming out of the wind from, with their tail blowing toward me, because the instant, the instant they detect your odor, they're gone. I mean, it is it is instantaneous. When they hit your human smell, the smell of a human being, they are gone.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:17:15] And so, it's very important that I try to lure the coyote in within, say, 20 or 30 feet, to get the images that I, that I really consider as top notch.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:17:27] And whereas with a rifle, all I have to do is just get up on a high spot where I can see several hundred yards. And then whenever they approach within 70 or 80 yards, I can just pick them off. That's, that's not hard to do.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:17:39] But with a camera, you're, it's a whole different ballgame. It's very difficult. Very difficult.

**David Todd** [01:17:50] This is fascinating. I love that you, you know, have had experience and interest in so many different kinds of animals, you know, whether from bison to coyote, and from modern-day animals to these ones that are only known from fossils.

**David Todd** [01:18:08] Is there anything that you'd like to tell us about your interest in wildlife and photographing wildlife, before we wrap up here?

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:18:19] Well, one of the one of the reasons I love documenting wildlife is just, is just to share with others the way that I see the lifeway of that creature.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:18:31] I remember a magazine editor, Sports Afield magazine editor, told me in 1981, he said, "You have a unique eye for light and for angle". And he said, "Your, your images are created from eye-level, and that gives way more impact to the photograph".

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:18:52] And, and I didn't really think about it. It was just, it was just the way that I saw animals. I liked to see them very intimately with the camera. And that has a great impact on the viewer who takes time to to look at the images, to study the photograph, the creative process.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:19:18] And so, and so I get so thrilled whenever I get a great coyote image. I mean, like four days ago we had a nice snow here and I went out and called all afternoon and called in seven, and got about, oh, ten really great images. And it was a coyote running straight at me with snow falling. And he was looking, boy, his eyes was boring right into that camera lens and all four feet were off the ground. And it was just, it's just, just a thrill every time I look at that image. And I posted it on Facebook and gosh, I had like 1200 likes. And on Instagram as well - people love those kind of images.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:20:04] And so something that that can put them there. I mean, 99% of people know that they will never be able to see what I see. Because, number one, I have access to so much really outstanding country, big ranch country. And number two, I have photographed wildlife for so many years and understand how to compose, and create a situation that puts the person right there with me. And, and I hear that response constantly to these images. It just feels like I'm right there with you. And that's what makes me tick. That's what keeps me going.

**David Todd** [01:20:49] That's great.

**David Todd** [01:20:52] Well, I have no more questions, but I always want to just make sure that we've covered everything you would like to speak about. Is there anything that we maybe overlooked that you'd like to mention before we sign off?

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:21:08] Gosh, I can't think of anything, Dave. You've done a good job.

**David Todd** [01:21:19] Well, it's an interesting story. And like you were saying, it's, I think you're very generous to share what you see with an experienced eye in these very remote, private places that most people will never have the opportunity to visit. So thank you for that.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:21:35] Yes, that's, and that's something else. You know, like as I go to, I can go to some locations where no one else can go virtually, and photograph like rock art sites from, from archaic man. And it's just to let people realize, these images let people realize that these places still exist. They may not ever get to see them. They're not in parks. I hardly ever go to a state park or a national park. This is all on private land.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:22:08] So, I would, so I hope that my images will reveal to the viewing public that there are still treasures, paleontological treasures, archeological treasures, and natural history treasures still out in the great state of Texas and beyond. And they're worthy of preserving. And I'm going to do my part to try to help preserve these, these locations and these, these creatures.

**David Todd** [01:22:39] That's great. You know, maybe they'll be out there in the landscape, but they'll also be, you know, on your digital and film images.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:22:49] Yes, sir.

**David Todd** [01:22:51] A real contribution. Well, thank you so much...

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:22:53] Well, thank you, david.

**David Todd** [01:22:53] For your time today. And I wish you the best with that new project in Arizona. That sounds like a terrific one. And I'll look for your coyote calling book. I'd like to get a look at that.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:23:06] All right. Go, go, go to [wymanmeinzer.com](http://wymanmeinzer.com), and go to the store. And you can actually order one right there and I'll sign it to you.

**David Todd** [01:23:20] You're very generous. Thank you so much.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:23:23] You bet. Thank you.

**David Todd** [01:23:24] It's been a treat to visit with you. Thank you so much.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:23:27] It's been my pleasure. Thank you.

**David Todd** [01:23:29] All right. You have a good day.

**Wyman Meinzer** [01:23:31] OK. You as well. Bye bye.