

BEN THOMPSON
Monday, November 23, 1998

Ann Townsend: Anne Andeen and myself, Ann Townsend, are privileged to meet and speak with Ben Thompson, who has been a long-time resident in Paradise Valley, and comes around and inspects our houses while they are being built. He will tell us other things he's done. Thank you for letting us come and talk with you today. We would like to know if we could quote you in part or all of what you are sharing with us today, please?

Ben Thompson: I don't have a problem with that.

Ann Townsend: Thank you. How long have you been here in Paradise Valley?

Ben Thompson: 38 years, same house on Hummingbird Lane.

Ann Townsend: 38 years, my goodness. You moved here probably just before it was incorporated.

Ben Thompson: Right. If I remember correctly, I signed the Articles of Incorporation. The fellow that was taking that around was called Pistol Pete. Did you ever hear of him?

Ann Townsend: I've heard of him. I don't know a lot about him. I just hear the name from several people. I hope you can fill us in. He sounded like he was a character.

Ben Thompson: Oh, he was. Yes, he was.

Ann Townsend: Well, anything you want to share with us, not only your living here, but have you worked for the Town all the 38 years also.

Ben Thompson: No, 22 years.

Ann Townsend: Well, you've got a lot to share there, as an inspector of houses.

Ben Thompson: A lot of people wish I would keep quiet about it, too.

Ann Townsend: Well, I think you have a wonderful story that needs to be told.

Anne Andeen: Tell us about McDonald and Invergordon.

Ben Thompson: Okay. McDonald was a man who moved here from Invergordon, Scotland. He bought that piece of property on the northwest corner of Invergordon and McDonald. He had the furniture trucks unload all the furniture out of the trucks. He hadn't built the house yet. And then he and his wife put all the furniture out on the vacant lot, kept rearranging it; until they decided this is where we want our bedroom; this is where we want the kitchen; this is how we want the furniture in the living room; and so on. Then they drew a line around all that with a stick, took the furniture out, put it back in storage, dug the footings and built the house. Then they put the furniture back in and moved in.

Anne Andeen: What was the time of all of this, approximately?

Ben Thompson: Oh gosh, I don't know, probably the late '20s.

Ann Townsend: Now that's one way to visualize how your house will look.

Ben Thompson: It was kind of a cute idea, for one thing. I guess they were in no hurry, and they just kept moving things around until they were both agreeable to it.

Anne Andeen: What was Invergordon?

Ben Thompson: A little town in Scotland somewhere. His last name was MacDonald. People say McDonald, but it was really MacDonald. Somehow or another it got recorded in the County because it was in the County at that time, and they were both dirt roads at the time.

Ann Townsend: Were street signs even installed then?

Ben Thompson: I believe so. If I'm correct, yes. I'm pretty sure it's "Mac."

Ann Townsend: Because the street sign is spelled "Mc" and it should be "Mac."

Ben Thompson: I'm reasonably certain that it's MacDonald.

Ann Townsend: How interesting. Well, it might have gotten recorded incorrectly, too.

Ben Thompson: I don't think so. I think if you go back to County records, you will see where it is probably MacDonald, if somebody wanted to take the time to go back. They just misspelled it when they made the street sign. Do you know that Elvira was born and raised here in Town on Hummingbird Lane? Most people don't. That's right across the street from the Scottsdale Plaza Resort, about an eighth of a mile west of Scottsdale Road. There's an old two-story rickety wood-framed home on the north side of Hummingbird. Now there are new homes being built there. She was one of our residents. Dan Flag, does that ring a bell to you? He was quite a character. He dressed in Levis, cowboy boots, leather vest, long sleeve shirt, an old felt hat. He lived on the north side of Hummingbird, right across from Elvira.

Anne Andeen: Yes, I do too remember him, D. Flagg.

Ben Thompson: D. Flagg. He was a wood carver. A lot of his woodcarvings are in banks all over the valley. He was a Town resident. I don't know how many people know that. A lot of people have probably never even heard of him before. He was quite a character.

Anne Andeen: You knew my uncle then, I'm sure. Charlie Mieg?

Ben Thompson: Boy, he sounds familiar.

Anne Andeen: He was the one who developed the north side part of Mummy Mountain. He and Jim Fallous. He was Swiss, spoke with an accent, and always smoked a pipe. They also had their house torn down.

Ben Thompson: Okay. He probably knew Ralph Shuback.

Anne Andeen: I always lived on the other leg of Hummingbird, where the Allison's live now. Then they were partners.

Ben Thompson: Finisterre used to be the Flying W Ranch. I'm trying to remember the gentleman's name that bought, in 1946, I think it was. If I remember correctly, he paid \$8,000 for it and it was 52 or 54 acres. He thought that was a lot of money back then, too. (It was.) I wish I could remember his last name. He built a car called something like, (Delorean). No, I don't think it was a Delorean, in the early 1940's. It only lasted a year or two, or something like that. I want to say, too, but I could be wrong on this, that he invented the simplest invention in the world, probably, and then his wife said why don't you this to it and he made millions more. He invented the bobby pin. She said why don't you put rubber tips on it so it doesn't scratch your scalp.

Ann Townsend: And his name again.

Ben Thompson: I can't remember.

Ann Townsend: It'll come to you.

Anne Andeen: Probably around three in the morning.

Ben Thompson: I believe it began with a "D" though. We know who built Mountain Shadows in the early '60s, that's Del Webb. Those homes started between \$19,000 and \$22,000 back then. Lincoln Drive was a dirt road back then, too. The County stopped at Mountain Shadows.

Anne Andeen: Mountain Shadows and Camelback Inn and all of them.

Ben Thompson: It was all in the County. We still have County islands like (Clearwater Hills). Well part of it, the majority of it is in the County and the people want to come in the Town in the worst way. They don't want to come into the Town because of the strict zoning and they have the real easy lackadaisical zoning of Maricopa County. But, here's the kicker, the reason they want to come into the Town is for police protection because a husband comes home, slaps his wife around, who does she call -- Maricopa County's Sheriff's Department, Fountain Hills, 45-minute drive, one-way. The response time could be deadly. That's the only reason they want to come into the Town is for police protection.

Ann Townsend: The Franciscan Renewal is still in County.

Ben Thompson: That's a County island. Where Helmsley lives, that used to be a County island. I think at one time, there were about nine pockets that were County islands.

Ann Townsend: Tell me, what did you do before you became a building inspector here in the Town? Did you do the same kind of work in another city or town?

Ben Thompson: No, I was doing some contracting. (You're a building contractor?) Yes, I was doing some building. It wasn't here in Town but in Scottsdale. Basically, that was it when I got out of ASU. I came to work for the Town in 1974 or '75, somewhere around there. Couldn't have a better place to work either. The only bad thing about it is the long drive to work (jokingly). You know the flat top on Mummy Mountain where there was a big spill? Do you know how that occurred or happened?

Anne Andeen: We were wondering about that, on the Lincoln Drive side. Is that the Donahoe property?

Ben Thompson: Yes, Donahoe.

Anne Andeen: I thought you meant the big road scar. Was Donahoe the one that put the road scar in?

Ben Thompson: No, they didn't, but they cut off the top of the mountain right over there.

Ann Townsend: They were going to build a triptych home.

Ben Thompson: Right, Frank Lloyd Wright designed it.

Anne Andeen: I was on the Board of Adjustment when that came before the Board. All they had was pictures. They had no working drawings, no details, and they were going to do something severe.

Ben Thompson: That was one of the last things that Frank Lloyd Wright designed. What he called "triptych." He said that the house he designed would put the top back on the mountain.

Ann Townsend: I've seen the drawings and they were very interesting. There was a spire that would rise up.

Ben Thompson: In fact, the last thing he designed is the Ascension Lutheran Church on Mockingbird and Hummingbird. He died before it was completed.

Ann Townsend: That's why on the records it shows that it was the Taliesin Group that worked on it.

Anne Andeen: Can you tell us something about the scar on Glenn Drive road, high on the south side of Mummy Mountain? I think that the scar was made before the Town was incorporated.

Ben Thompson: It was done when it was in the County, way back in the '50s.

Anne Andeen: Other than developers, do we know who did it?

Ben Thompson: I bet if you ask Bill Mead, the Town engineer, he would know. Les Naumann might know also.

Ann Townsend: I can't document where I heard it, but it seemed that that was the concept, that the developers were going to build near the mountaintop on Glenn Drive. The people were panicking and hurriedly passed the rule that no houses could be built at that altitude. He had to put some chemicals on it (Eonite) to make it right.

Ben Thompson: Antique it right back to the original. We still do that because it is required.

Anne Andeen: What's interesting comments do you have about early development?

Ben Thompson: There are so many of them.

Anne Andeen: Are there any that particularly impressed you or really caught your eye, or is everything all in a day's work?

Ben Thompson: No, no. I'm smiling because some of them are pretty weird.

Anne Andeen: I think our house was built before you came to be a building inspector.

Ben Thompson: I know it was, but I remember when you put an addition on it a few years ago. I remember that. One house in the Town that is interesting and is on the same

street where Scott O'Connor is getting ready to build his new home, Denton Lane. This house has a very large entertainment room sub-grade, below ground. It has a wet bar, shuffleboard court, and juke box. It is a good size, probably 30 by 60. What is really unique about it is that when you're standing in the room having cocktails, if you look towards the south end of the room, you look through real thick plate glass windows, into the deep end of the swimming pool where he would hire go-go dancers to swim in the nude and frolic like sea nymphs while the party was going on. That was kind of unusual.

Anne Andeen: Yes, I guess so. Were you ever invited?

Ann Townsend: How else would he have known.

Ben Thompson: The poor guy, he had cancer and only lived there about six months before he passed away.

Ann Townsend: Any interesting or funny anecdotes?

Ben Thompson: On the northeast corner of Doubletree and Invergordon, I knew there was a lot of hoaky stuff going on there. All the subcontractors were going up to Lake Havasu on the weekend and using the fellow's boat to have a good time. This fellow is the largest pornographer in the United States and he is still living there to the best of my knowledge. He was also dealing in narcotics. The Feds came and talked to me, Dan McNabb, and one or two other persons. They wanted me to memorize everything in that house, and write it down while I'm going through it, so that when they get a search warrant and are ready to go in, they didn't want to be surprised by booby traps. I told them where all the rooms were. They also studied the blueprints which we had. This guy is really heavy on prostitution and pornography. They waited for him to go to his place in Minnesota. An agent follows him up there and kept an eye on him,

until he got on the plane to return. Once he got on the plane to return, that agent let the officials here know that the guy was in the air. When they went into the house, allies couldn't get a hold of him in Minnesota because he was on the airplane. There's no way to contact him and tell him that they were waiting for him and would nab him as soon as he landed. The agent that was following him gave a detailed description of what he was wearing. When he flew into Sky Harbor and went to get his suitcase, he put his hand on the suitcase and they put the cuffs on him.

Ann Townsend: Did he spend any time in jail?

Ben Thompson: No, he bailed out. I think he's still in there (house). They came to me when they were making their plans to go in and asked about the rooms. And I said, "That room doesn't exist. It's on the plans, but it's not there." I had to detail everything for them and they wanted me to go in with them when they went in. After they took it down, they wanted me to go in and show them where the secret places were located.

Anne Andeen: Not only do you inspect, but you do various different law enforcement things.

Ben Thompson: We see a lot of things. One thing I'm very guarded about is when I go to a person's backyard and I know someone is living there, I don't look at the house. If I'm inspecting the gas line to the pool heater, I look for the pool equipment, go straight there and don't look at the house. Remember in the late '80s when the savings and loans were going under, people were committing suicides, you don't want to look at the house and see someone laying on the chaise lounge with a gun to his head. And that's happened. Then that ruins your day because you have to wait for the police to show up and explain why you're there, what you saw and so on. I never look into the house. Or

you might get people who want to gossip about their neighbors. Another thing I do is take doggy bones with me when I go into the backyards because I never know if they have a German Shepherd or Doberman. A couple of times I've had to jump in the swimming pool to get away from a dog. After that, I carry dog bones, get down on the ground and look them in the eyes and toss them a dog bone that generally stops them. I generally yell out or rattle the gates, but you never know.

Ann Townsend: That's amazing. I thought your main challenges were to see that the building codes were obeyed.

Ben Thompson: You really see some very interesting things. One person in a home around the Camelback Golf Course flew in a prima donna paper hanger to hang the wallpaper. They put him up at the Biltmore. I was there when he was putting the straight edge against the wall. You see a little bit of daylight and he says, "I'm going back to New York on tomorrow's flight. You call me back in a couple of weeks when the walls are absolutely flat." And they did, they called him back. The wallpaper they put up was Chinese silk at \$2,600 a roll.

Ann Townsend: You have to have straight walls for that.

Ben Thompson: We have a house under construction right now where they are going to gold leaf all the ceilings in the home. All the gold handles that the interior decorators (actually I call them inferior decorators) used were \$4,350 for each door. It's la-la land.

Anne Andeen: Can you tell us anything about the Helmsley mansion? Did you have any interaction with her?

Ben Thompson: Leona Helmsley. No, I don't think I got any closer to her than from here to that door over there. She has a trout pond up there with a water chiller on it to keep the trout cool during the summer. She has a lap pool. There used to be a solid concrete tennis court which they jack hammered out. They had to take a crane and put a tractor up there to pick up all the broken concrete. They had to build a \$27,000 steel shoot to let the broken concrete go down the slide, and into the back end of dump trucks. They hauled out the tennis court. They built a lap pool there glass enclosed. They have four swimming pool heaters at 2,250,000 BTU each. I think it has to be kept within two or three degrees of 73 degrees all year round, otherwise Andy the caretaker is looking for another job.

Ann Townsend: No wonder she is asking \$25 million for her property.

Ben Thompson: She only paid \$8 million for it. She bought it at the last minute when Western Savings called in the loan and was going to default on the owner. When she bought the house, the chandelier that was in the front entry went with the house. It was built in mid-16th Russia and has a pedigree from here to Scottsdale Road and back, telling who owned and when, and what they paid for it. They say it went from Stalingrad to Athens, Athens to Venice, Venice to Buenos Aires. The chandelier went around the world several times. I think the value of it, last I heard many, many years ago, is \$850,000.

Anne Andeen: Did Dave Hansen build that house?

Ben Thompson: Yes, it was his house. When Western Savings went under, he was about ready to go. You have the trout pond, the lap pool, and then the regular swimming

pool. The regular swimming pool has six underwater stereo speakers in it so you can hear music while you're swimming under water.

Ann Townsend: What do you think is going to happen to these houses that you have described with the gold leaf on the ceiling all so luxurious?

Anne Andeen: I look at the houses now that are 30 or 35 years old and they are tearing them down.

Ben Thompson: They're not buying the homes, they're buying the dirt under them. They don't want the homes. I'm inspecting new homes now where it seems not too long ago, I inspected the house that was there before. I've seen 10-year old homes being knocked down. It's unreal. Getting back to the gold leaf ceilings reminds me that the house next door to it is under construction as well right now. They budgeted \$800,000 for the landscaping and have already gone over \$1 million and they haven't planted a plant yet. And the lady that is going to live there ordered cabinets for the master bedroom closet that ran over \$100,000, just for the cabinets inside the master bedroom closet. I was talking to the builder next door about the cabinets that this lady is putting in, he just smiled. I said, "Don't tell me your client spent more than that on her cabinets." He said, "Yes, Ben, but I don't want to tell you how much." It's just phenomenal. It's just unreal.

Ann Townsend: You know times are going to turn. There will be a day of reckoning and you wonder, what is going to happen to these places?

Ben Thompson: Have you seen a border carpet? It has a one foot trim going around the wall. One home in town has one that is 100% virgin wool, hand woven, and \$1,840 a yard. The interior carpeting was \$1,680 a yard. The interior decorator wouldn't let them

carry it through the house and bend the carpet going around corners. They had to remove all the windows in the house, the house was completely done, take a crane and lift up the carpet and put it through the window to the right rooms. They built the pool first because it was a hillside lot. All the way through the construction of it, the pool bothered the gentleman that owned the place. Finally, when they were done, they tore the pool out. It's la la land. Every time I think I've seen everything, there is something new. The way some of these people make their money is unreal too. We have a resident here that invented the tab top can. He gets a half penny for every can made. We have the man who invented the bobby pin with the rubber tip. There's a lot of stories like that around here, too.

Ann Townsend: You've seen a lot of changes, too, especially in the home building. What people find was their ideal for a home 30 years ago is not what they want today.

Anne Andeen: Do you have difficulty working with the architects? Are they pretty respectful?

Ben Thompson: They are. As a rule, I don't have any problems with builders. It's generally the architect and I never meet them or talk to them on the phone. You can draw anything on paper, but you go to put together and it doesn't work. That's where the problem comes in. By and large, we're pretty lucky because we have very good builders. We have had up until recently. It seems like there is a lot of outsiders coming in because the money is here to be made. We have a lot builders who are the same year after year and they live in the Town as well. They have a concern of maintaining property values. We get some of these prima donnas that come in and build one or two houses before they find out that they are not wanted. They end up going somewhere else like Fountain Hills.

We don't have that many problems at all. We tell them what they have to do and they do it. The approach I take is that if there is a serious problem, I tell them that I've got a problem and need their help, instead of saying why did you do that? If you tell them I've got a problem, then they feel like they're doing you a favor. They are more apt to listen. Beats them yelling at me.

Ann Townsend: Are there any new policies or ways of doing things that you would like to see happen to make better built homes?

Ben Thompson: No, I don't have a problem with the construction materials or the way they are built. A lot times, they are over-built. It makes you wonder if the architect is getting a percentage of the material that is going into this home. Our biggest problem from the building inspection aspect is zoning compliance. People want to put their guest house on the property line rather than 10 feet off the property line. What they're trying to do is put 10 pounds of potatoes in a one pound bag. You have 43,560 feet in one acre and they want to build a Taj Mahal, a 3,000 square foot guest house, they want the ramada, the pool, the tennis court and so on.

Ann Townsend: That's what my husband and I call building a palace on a postage stamp.

Ben Thompson: That's right.

Ann Townsend: One of the new codes has reduced the percentage of lot coverage.

Ben Thompson: And they're complaining about it. The one's that are mainly complaining are the new contractors coming into Town that want to come in and get out quickly. They don't appreciate the Town as much as the contractor that has been around for a long time and lives in the Town as well. Because they have an investment in the

Town and they want to maintain the high property values. But you have the speculators that come in, throw something together that is big and, make a lot of money and get out. Maybe you can't blame them. I don't like it personally.

Ann Townsend: It's certainly a different standard of living.

Anne Andeen: A lot of people that come in want to be there for awhile, pay these outrageous payments for six months to a year and then are gone because they can't afford it.

Ben Thompson: It's nothing to have \$12,000 a month payment.

Ann Townsend: So when times turn around, what are they going to do?

Ben Thompson: And times do turn around. It's cycles just like the seasons.

Anne Andeen: I have another question about the house that is built on the east end of Mummy Mountain where they replaced the top, down below the Donahoes.

Ben Thompson: The Fred Shaulis residence.

Anne Andeen: Did they or you run into any kind of construction problems?

Ben Thompson: Not at all. That house is so overbuilt, it's unreal. Kitchell Contracting built that house. They're primarily commercial, but he has gotten into the custom home division, which started maybe five years ago. The supervision on that job is A+. They're strictly union, not that I have anything against them. Everything just went together like all the gears in a fine watch. It's interesting. When you drive in on Indian Bend, you look up there and it does look like two houses.

Anne Andeen: It sure does. I was very skeptical at first.

Ben Thompson: So was I.

Anne Andeen: One time, I was out on my horse, riding up Morning Glory. I saw this big horse trailer parked down there. I saw the horses going up the hill, and coming back. They couldn't get a machine up there, so these horses were packing sand and hauling it up the hill.

Ben Thompson: They were adding the sand so that when they went to backfill, those blocks wouldn't flush the sewer pipes.

Anne Andeen: They had six horses working. Mine was standing there watching it all.

Ben Thompson: Personally, I don't think I would enjoy living in it. I don't think there is any two rooms that are on the same elevation. It is cut up in stair steps. They're not very large rooms either because of the confines they had to deal with.

Ann Townsend: It looks like two separate houses.

Ben Thompson: That's what we wanted it to look like. They notched out the mountain per what was required, then they built what I call a freeway overpass. They formed and poured the concrete. They let that all cure, built the house under it, and then they put dirt and put back the original palo verde and cactus. They had aerial photographs of it so they could put it back just the way it was. It turned out quite nice.

Ann Townsend: It blends in very nicely into the mountain. I wouldn't have believed it two years ago.

Ben Thompson: Fred Shaulis is the largest single individual owner of jet aircraft in the world. He owns Corporate Jets of America. Basically, he leases his jets and pilots to big companies like Motorola. If Bob Galvin, the owner of Motorola, wants to call a

meeting of his executives, they go to the airport, get on one of Fred Shaulis's planes and they fly up there and back. That's how Fred Shaulis makes his money.

Ann Townsend: How did he make his money to own the planes that he leases out?

Ben Thompson: I don't know. But the way people make money around here is just amazing, the hair pins the tab top cans.

Ann Townsend: The common stuff you take for granted. Is there anything else you want to share for us?

Ben Thompson: You want me to predict something?

Ann Townsend: Yes, I would love for you to predict something.

Ben Thompson: There is a piece of property between Lincoln Drive, Indian Bend Road, Mockingbird Lane and Scottsdale Road, that Little America owns, and part of it is in the Town. I predict that the owners are waiting for the state of Arizona to legalize gambling. I predict that he will build a great big gambling casino there. And when Kent Wick decides that he wants to sell Judson School, then they will build an underpass under Mockingbird and use that for parking.

Anne Andeen: Poor St. Barnabas, it will be surrounded.

Ann Townsend: But wouldn't the Town have something to say about it?

Ben Thompson: The majority of that on the east side of Mockingbird is in the City of Scottsdale. It doesn't belong in the Town.

Ann Townsend: Wouldn't Scottsdale have something to say about it?

Ben Thompson: Look at the money base that they would be getting from that resort. Don't you think they wish they had part of that Indian reservation in Scottsdale?

Ann Townsend: Oh, I'm sure. So you're really saying greed rides again.

Ben Thompson: They had a 30-year lease on that land. Remember when they came to the Town and said they wanted to build some little casitas in there. That was all a smoke screen so once they get a building permit from the Town, which the Town gave for the little casitas, and they said we want to get going with a hotel and resort. The Town didn't say anything about the hotel and resort because it is in Scottsdale. But they said we want to build casitas. They got a building permit for little casitas, then they brought in a tractor trailer rig and knocked down some bushes. That's called commencement of construction. That means they could renew their 30-year lease with the City of Scottsdale without losing their lease. Part of the lease read that they had to commence construction within a certain date, otherwise it was going to go back to the City of Scottsdale. So once they had that permit and then showed that they went out there and knocked a few bushes down, they honored their commitment and they got an extension on their lease which is what they wanted. They said it was too soft and the time wasn't right to build a resort. They just wanted to get some time on their hands.

Ann Townsend: Now do they have to renew that contract in the sense of scraping the land again every so often?

Ben Thompson: With the City of Scottsdale. I don't know what their agreement is. Only a small portion of that is in the Town. That's what I think we're going to see.

Anne Andeen: I don't see that.

Ben Thompson: You've got all that noise and traffic on Lincoln Drive, Scottsdale Road and Mockingbird Lane. And a lot of it is not even Town residents. They're coming from the other side of Shea. We're taking the brunt of the traffic. Tatum is backed up until 9:30 every morning.

Ann Townsend: Any other predictions? One of the things I thought I might ask you is about MacDonald. Since it is connected to the 101, is that going to encroach in our Town?

Ben Thompson: I don't know the answer to that one. Perhaps Bill Mead the Town Engineer would know because he is in touch with the City of Scottsdale quite a bit. We still have quite a bit of land left that people don't recognize or realize like Casa Verde down on Mockingbird and McDonald, next door to Avis Read. Avis has a pretty good size property, too. East of her is Casa Verde, an old resort. Julie Firestone has property on MacDonald and Casa Blanca, on the northeast corner. There will be some big subdivision land the size of La Place. The land doesn't justify having a \$250,000 home on it anymore. You can hardly build a guest house for that. I just wrote a building permit for \$500,000 for a guest house. Every time I go around the corner and think I've seen everything, there is a wet towel ready to hit me right in the face. I would not even thought of doing this and that. Like Gordie Hormel with his ice skating rink. A house at La Place has a two-lane bowling alley. All kinds of things.

Anne Andeen: I guess it makes the value of our house higher. I don't like to look at it.

Ann Townsend: We live on the north side of Mummy Mountain on Hummingbird. Back in the canyon, there is a lot of building of multi-million dollar houses going in. Right now they're building all around us. Do you know how many more houses can go in there?

Anne Andeen: I think it's 36. They had 39 at the concession.

Ben Thompson: Something like that. That was Bob Burns. Bob Burns and Muin Kalla were close. Did you know Muin Kalla, the camel jockey. That guy is bad news.

Ann Townsend: Those properties can't all be on an acre? The ones on the upper roads make sense cause the property goes up to the top.

Anne Andeen: A lot of them are flag lots, or panhandle lots, and use common driveways. They have some big acreages up there near the top, five-acre lots.

Ann Townsend: When you look at them, they look closer as if they are on top of each other.

Anne Andeen: The houses are big.

Ann Townsend: Yes.

Ben Thompson: They're not going anywhere. They are overbuilt and cling to the mountain.

Ann Townsend: I believe the mountain is very unstable. It isn't granite.

Ben Thompson: It's not going to go anywhere. I had problems with Leona Helmsley's house because they were going according to the plans and putting the structural steel in the masonry walls. I came along to inspect and told them to pull all the steel out and pump the concrete in it, and then put the steel back in. The steel is so close together you couldn't get the concrete down between it. I've had to do that with a few of those homes on the mountain.

Ann Townsend: What are they tying the top rebar to though?

Ben Thompson: They are all connected in the masonry wall and embedded in concrete. Then you have vertical steel coming out of the footing and tied into that. Mrs. Helmsley wanted to move the house. She bought a big five-acre lot in Palm Beach,

Florida. She wanted to move the house off the mountain and take it to Florida. I told Andy the caretaker that there's no way she could take the house off the mountain. As it turned out, the deed restriction in Palm Beach said that only single story homes could be built and this is two or three stories. She spent money to buy five acres that she couldn't even put the house on it.

Ann Townsend: Anything else you want to say?

Ben Thompson: I'll jot it down and call you. You know how it is, you walk away and then an hour later you remember something.

Ann Townsend: We've enjoyed your tales.

Ben Thompson: This job is a lot of fun. No two days are alike.

Ann Townsend: We can tell that you enjoy your work.

Ben Thompson: These contractors know that they are going to have to do what we tell them to do.

Ann Townsend: Sure, they have to meet code.

Ben Thompson: I like to say this is what we need to do. They don't feel like you're against them. We're here to work with you not against you. It's hard enough to do what you have to do without someone pulling at you all the time.

Ann Townsend: Well you were a contractor so you understood their point of perspective, so you are more compassionate and understanding.

Ben Thompson: Did you ever see Bob Shubock's old house, the round one on Indian Bend? I was there when he built that. Everything is round.

Anne Andeen: He built the Osgood house, too.

Ben Thompson: Oh yes, Shana Osgood. Jim Osgood passed away and Shana is in a old lady's home on Hayden. Shana would call me all the time to fix her roof or do some electrical work. She sure is a nice old lady. I liked Jim very much too. I remember when he built that house. Now look at that monster that's there. Two story house, all white foam, it's going to drag on and on. A hairdresser from the Biltmore is building it. He's paying for everything out of pocket as he gets the money.

Anne Andeen: Isn't there a time limit on the amount of time it takes to build something.

Ben Thompson: As long as they call for an inspection every 90 days, it's okay. If they go over 90 days, then we can say they have to renew their building permit. All they have to do is pound a few boards and call us to look at it, they have an inspection slip showing we were there. They could drag that on forever.

Anne Andeen: It's on Mockingbird, south of Lincoln and north of MacDonald. It's been going on for years. Nobody lives there.

Ben Thompson: The gray one. It belongs to Dr. Shaw. I don't think he knows what's going on either. He lives across the street on the other corner in the brick house. She doesn't want to move into the new house. He wants to.

Anne Andeen: I just wondered because I've noticed that house has been under construction forever. I thought you had a year's time to complete it.

Ben Thompson: If he hangs a door every 90 days and has us come out and look at it, he can keep that permit going. I finally had enough of Dr. Shaw. I said you have to final this house. I don't care if it's a minimum bare bones past code, as long as you have sanitary facilities, cooking facilities and sleeping facilities, your safety features, then I'll

final it. I wanted to get it off my books because it's been dragging on forever. He is tall, gray-haired, and works out there.

Ann Townsend: It took forever to get it built.

Ben Thompson: I know. I think he was testing my patience.

Anne Andeen: I thought you had to have it wrapped up within a year from when you started. I didn't know that you could drag it.

Ann Townsend: Why did he build it if his wife doesn't want to move in it?

Ben Thompson: I haven't the slightest clue. She's a doctor, too. I think he has a hearing problem. He has a practice and maybe is working with his wife. There's a lot of interesting little stories in this Town.

Ann Townsend: If you think of any more let us know. You should sit down and write a book on it.

Ben Thompson: You know about the Saudi's across the street.

Anne Andeen: Officer Roy used to tell us that he handled the security.

Ben Thompson: The queen had back surgery. They flew in rugs and lamps for the hospital. The queen would be walking around La Place in a circle, getting some fresh air. She had three body guards while taking a leisurely stroll. There's also a body guard walking backward to see the queen and the three other body guards in case someone comes from behind them. I could spend half a day telling stories about that place. She sent her pilot back to Saudi Arabia to get a five pound can of coffee. She went to the Phoenix Steak Farm on Scottsdale Road and Thomas. He only had four or five cans of this Arab coffee. She and her entourage went to buy the coffee and he had sold it. So the pilot went back to bring the coffee. She had \$27,000 a week room reserved at the

Phoenician in case they wanted to drop in for lunch. Nobody used that room during the week. They had 29 rooms at the Biltmore reserved whether they used them or not for the pilots and flight personnel. They had a sniper in a eucalyptus tree overlooking the ditch on Invergordon because the queen's bedroom was at the northwest corner of the house and they were worried about a sniper coming around. So they had a bunch of guys sitting on the trees 24 hours a day. They big screen TV's and stereo equipment. When they got ready to leave, they told the cops on duty that they could have anything else in the house. This is really scary. They had one guy travel with the prince wherever he went. The reason for this was because he has a compatible heart donor. So if anything should happen to the prince, this guy would lay his life on the table in the hospital. I would imagine his wife and kids were very well taken care of in Saudi Arabia. When he wakes up in the morning, he would probably think, "I hope the prince is feeling good today." The security was unreal.

Ann Townsend: Did they trash the houses at all?

Ben Thompson: The only thing that was disconcerting about the house when they left was that they burnt incense and it permeated into the walls and drapes. They had to have the interior of the houses repainted and redraped. Another story was that the prince and his entourage would come in and a policeman would say good morning so and so. It's a lovely day outside. He gave him a real nice salutation. The prince would nod his head and keep on going. One of his entourage would pull out a \$500 bill and say that that was a nice thing to say this morning. They threw money around like it was nothing. There was a Council meeting one night and someone noticed the flood lights across the street because of the security that they had. I was asked the next morning to tone down

the flood lights because we have a code that reads, "from line of sight, should not be able to see element, filament, bulb or light emitting source, and no spillage of light onto adjacent property, considered an encroachment or invasion of privacy." I had to go and tell the security people the facts about how to adjust the light. They had a bunch of homes rented over there. I had to go to the command post, the gray house. When I walked into the garage, they had tables covered with roast beef, turkey, ham, fruits and vegetables. This was wintertime. They took me in and introduced me to an English colonel who was in charge of security. They asked me to eat with them. I said, "Watermelon, that's had to come from New Zealand." He said I was right and how did I know that. I said we're not growing watermelon in the winters here. Our winters are summers in New Zealand. He said, "I could use a chap like you because you're using your head." We go in to sit down and talk and we hear behind, "George, George are you there." He says, "Here I am." "How's my mother doing today?" "Quite well, your highness." "Where are you right now?" "I'm in my jet crossing the Mediterranean, going over to Athens. I'll be there for a little while." There was no static, nothing. You'd swear this guy was in the same room, yet he was flying the air force jet going to Athens and was just checking up on his mother. La la land. No two days alike.

Ann Townsend: Thank you ever so much.

Ben Thompson: I'll try and dig up older stuff. That's what you're really after.

Ann Townsend: You're a wonderful storyteller.

Ben Thompson: There's a lot of interesting stories out there, believe me.

Ann Townsend: We appreciate your sharing some of them with us.

Ben Thompson: It's been fun.