

The Passing of a Legend

BY MIKE DUPUY

Famed Canadian falconer Frank Lyman Beebe dies at age 95

It was 2001, and I had volunteered to be the raffle coordinator at the annual NAFA field meet, held that year in Lamar, Colorado. I liked the idea of Lamar, because it was where I had attended my first NAFA meet some years before, so I knew where to hunt and what to expect. Base camp was at the “Cow Palace,” and it was NAFA’s 40th anniversary.

I think it was on my first morning in Lamar that I saw Greg Thomas sitting with Hal Webster, Frank Beebe, and a woman I could not identify, and they were eating breakfast. When I saw these two legends of falconry having a bite to eat with each other, I pulled my Nikon from around my neck and started taking pictures. People kept coming up to Hal and Frank and shaking their hands or asking for an autograph.

Later that morning at the weathering yard I commented to some other falconers about what I had seen. No

one believed my story. “Oh no,” said one falconer, “they don’t talk anymore.” “It’s on account of the book,” said another.



“No, really,” I said, naively. “I saw them together, and they were having breakfast. I took pictures.”

They both looked at my camera and scoffed: “They don’t talk to each other.”

I had heard about Beebe and Webster’s falling out over their book, *North American Falconry and Hunting Hawks*—you know, the “Bible”—but at that time I didn’t know the details surrounding their co-authorship, nor did I know much about the roles they had played in starting NAFA or how they later fell out of grace with the club. But the weathering yard conversation made me curious. I started to inquire, and I later set up a Thanksgiving lunch date with Frank to interview him. My principle interview tool was an inexpensive cassette recorder I bought a few days earlier on my way to have lunch with Hal Webster. But Hal made me turn off the tape-recorder at some key points in the interview so he could tell me some things off the record.

Frank Beebe was an entirely different story. He paid no attention to the tape recorder, except that he would pause when I had to change the tape



Mike DuPuy (at left) and his wife Christine have coffee with Hal Webster (left) and Frank Beebe during a break in filming. The author spent three days shooting in-depth interviews with the two legendary North American falconers.

then pick up the conversation where we had left off. We must have talked for close to three hours, and he explained things clearly and directly. Actually, interviewing Frank and Hal made me want more. They were both colorful characters, with rich multidimensional stories that intersected, overlapped, diverged, ran parallel, came back together again, and then divided once more. I felt I had done something important by getting a bit of their oral histories on tape, and countless falconers who walked past us on that Thanksgiving Day gave me the thumbs up or interrupted us to get an autograph or take a picture of Frank.

As I headed home after the meet I decided that I needed to conduct a real interview with these two legendary falconers. I wanted both of them to be in each other’s company,

so that I could interview them side-by-side and then each alone. I did not have the means to do it in 2001, but I kept thinking about it as a film project and reminding myself that the day would likely come someday soon

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when I would get an e-mail or phone call telling me that one of these two legends of North American Falconry had passed away. When I finally got the e-mail it was Frank who had died on November 15, 2008. His second wife, Klara, tried calling me and could not get through, so I read about Frank’s death in an e-mail.

Fortunately, by that time I had already brought my interview project to

fruition. In June 2006, my wife Christine and I had flown from Maryland to Colorado to meet Hal Webster in Denver, and from there, we all flew to Vancouver, British Columbia, to visit Frank, who was then 93 years old. Over

the course of three days, we spoke together on camera—and this time it was not a cheap K-Mart tape-recorder but an expensive Sony High Definition Video Camera with professional microphones. When the tapes stopped

rolling, we had 14 hours of footage, most of which consisted of interviews with Frank and Hal—both together and separately—plus lots of “B roll” footage of them in a car, greeting each other, joking together, eating a meal, taking a walk, and finally saying farewell at the end of the visit. One of my favorite shots was of Frank doing his daily routine of 60 jumps on a trampoline.



Over the course of the three days, Frank and I got to know each other well. I found him to be as honest and earnest as he had been back in Lamar, but he took this enterprise on with a seriousness I did not see the first time. It may have been because of the lengths I

had gone through to pull this off or his need to say certain things. I now think it was probably a little of both. Since that trip in June 2006, I stayed in regular contact with Frank and Klara Beebe.

For a time in 2007, Frank had me believing that he was fit enough to take

a trip up to Chilkat Pass for one more trapping adventure. We both schemed and planned it like two young boys, but Klara set me straight one day when I called as Frank was taking a nap. After that, I told him I had thought better of it and did not want to be the falconer who returned with him lying dead in the seat next to me. We actually talked that way to each other a lot, with laughs in between—we had become close friends.

With Frank's approval, I recorded some of our telephone conversations. I had asked him for some still photographs from when he was a young falconer during the interview, and he told me they had all been destroyed at the Sydney house. When I brought up getting some photographs on the phone one time he said he had some personal photographs he could send me. One day a small package wrapped in brown paper arrived. Inside was a small box—the kind you get black trash bags in—and it was full of old pictures and slides. Upon later reflection it dawned on me that Frank knew how serious I was about making



When they first met in 2001, Mike DuPuy sat at a restaurant table with Frank Beebe and recorded their conversation on an inexpensive cassette recorder (above). This is when he got the idea to interview Beebe and Webster on videotape. On the facing page, four-year-old Frank poses with his brother, Rupert. Below, Beebe with an intermewed goshawk.

a documentary of his life and times, so he gave me the photographs as a gift. One of them stood out among them—a framed, sepia-tone picture of Frank at age 4 with his younger brother Rupert.

That picture has been a daily reminder of my mission to complete a documentary worthy of Frank's life in falconry. To do him full justice, I knew that I would have to make a documentary about three distinct lives. Frank was not only a grand master falconer, he was an accomplished artist, a renowned illustrator, and he somehow managed to become one of the premier falconry authors in North America.

It was August 18, 2008. I had talked to both Frank and Klara by telephone. My notes tell me we spoke about the progress of the American election,

some family stuff going on with Klara's children, and my trip to South Africa for the International Association for Falconry annual meeting. He told me he had gone back to the restaurant at Long Beach, where he, Hal, Christine, and I had shared a meal. He and Klara had visited that restaurant, as was their custom on their shared birthday, May 25th. He told me August was the best part of the year, because the air was "marine cool." He had suffered several strokes by then and had lost some 90 percent of his vision. "I have had my world collapse around me, to the extent of these four walls," he told me. And after the strokes came prostate cancer.

I spoke with Klara when Frank was no longer conscious. He would occasionally respond to some stimuli, Klara told me—like when his dog was

put on his bed next to him, he would smile and pet the dog. Klara had been working 24 hours a day taking care of Frank. She was tired. I could hear it in her voice. A day or two before Frank died I checked in with Klara, and she told me a nurse was showing her how to give Frank doses of morphine. She told me that his heart was so strong, it would not stop beating in spite of 95 years of living, and he would not let go.

In one of our last conversations, Frank told me, "I know I am slipping away, and it is time for me to go, but I am not ready to leave yet." These words sting now as I think back on them. I miss you Frank, even though you are still all around me.

To learn more about Frank Lyman Beebe, visit the web site FrankBeebe.org