Back Tracking

by Max Greiner Jr.

This column provides a historical look back at the life of an American artist.

Years:1961-1967
(Age 10 to 16)

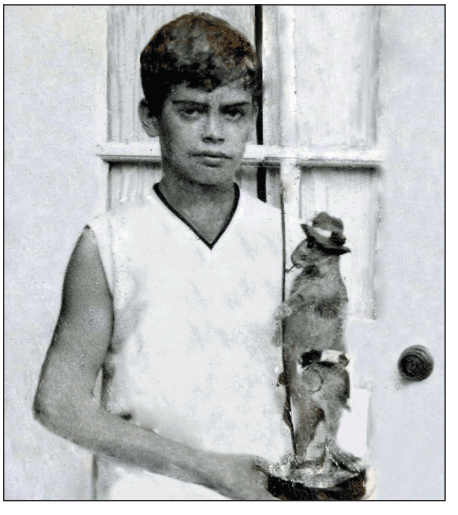
My years between age 10 and 16 (5th grade to 11th grade) were wonderful! This was the season of my life when I recognized my own abilities and my passions. This was the time when I became fully aware of my God-given talents and the beautiful, natural world God had created around me. This was my era of creativity, exploration, hobbies and adventure!

By the grace of God, I was blessed with good parents who encouraged each of their four children (of which I was the oldest) to do their very best, use their gifts and follow their hearts. I heard my parents, Max G. Greiner and Bobbie Sue Greiner; say many times that I was never board alone! In the sixties, years before computers and video games, I never needed anyone else to have fun. I was always able to entertain and educate myself by exploring and reading. At this "pre-teen/teenage" stage in my life I had two great loves: the great out-of-doors and making things. Both passions would consume all of my free time and would eventually prepare me for my destiny.

At age 14 Max learned taxidermy from a correspondence course. He would later turn this hobby into a business and eventually teach a class in high school on the subject to students and teachers. "***The Rabbit Fisherman***" was Max's first creative taxidermy project, which he gave to his Grandfather, E.O. Greiner. This rabbit was also Max's first bowhunting "trophy"!

As far as I can remember, I have LOVED nature. My appreciation, fascination and respect for God's creation happened about the time Jesus came into my life, at age 7. Being alone in the woods of east Texas, or in the alligator marshes near our home in Port Arthur, was always a great adventure for me. I felt like Daniel Boone or Davy Crockett, armed first with a sling shot, bow, BB gun, and later with shot gun and 22 rifle. However, archery would eventually be my sport of choice.

When I was young, I loved to catch turtles, birds, small wild animals and non-poisonous snakes (I knew the difference). Being alone in the "wild" was a spiritual experience that God and I shared together. I distinctly remember God saving me numerous times from the bites of Water Moccasins, Copperheads, Rattlesnakes and Coral snakes, in addition to a few other situations that should have killed me!



My grandparents and my father taught me to hunt, fish and trap. Our family owned a small, one room cedar cabin, with no glass windows, running water or a working toilet! The little cabin sat on 7 acres of land, right in the bend of "Big Cow Creek", near Kirbyville, TX. This primitive camp was in the "Big Thicket", about an hour from our home. I knew every inch of that "wonderland". I built my first tree house there.

Then around 1966, my folks sold the little cabin and "upgraded" to 116 acres on "Turkey Creek", near the small town of Woodville. This property was an oasis, with an emerald, spring-fed pond, lined with majestic pine, oak and magnolia trees, graced with delicate flowering dogwood trees. This beautiful property had an old farm house on it, which had glass on the windows and a working toilet! I would be married at this special place in 1975. It would later be the inspiration for many impressionistic oil paintings.

When I wasn't hunting in the woods or fishing in the small pond, I was building an elaborate tree house, three stories up in the top of a giant oak tree . At night, if I wasn't running a trot line or predator calling, I was working on my Lionel Train layout which filled my bedroom on three sheets of plywood. I built elaborate scenes "from scratch", that included trees, grass, mountains, rivers and buildings.

During this period of my life, I became an accomplished hunter and taxidermist. I learned the art of hunting from reading every outdoor magazine I could find. I learned taxidermy from a mail order correspondence course that was advertised in the hunting magazines of that day. I was 13 when I mounted my first specimen at the "Cow Creek" camp. Only my Grandma Greiner had the patience and willingness to help me skin and mount my first specimen, which was a Barred Owl. Many other specimens would follow, as I turned my hobby into a small business. When I reached high school, the Biology teacher asked me to teach a class in taxidermy for students and teachers after school, which I did in 1968.

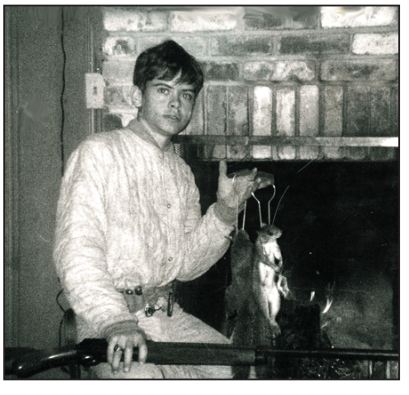
Max created his first mural for the **XII World Jamboree** dipicting three regions of Texas. The 6' x 8' canvas was painted by Max in oil at age 15.

On June 28, 1966, at the age of 14, Max was awarded the highest rank of the Boy Scouts, the coveted "**Eagle**". Max earned the rank with his bestfriend Michael Scott McWilliams. C.J. McElroy (center) was the Scout Master of **Troop 84** in Port Arthur, TX.

Max went on a 21 day scouting adventure to the **XII Boy Scout World Jamboree** in the summer of 1967, at age 15. Pictured left to right front row: Max Greiner Jr., George Sanders, Frank Skeeler. Top row: John Richard, Michael Scott McWilliams, George Collin & Advisor, E.W. Watson.

Encouraged by my dad who was an "Eagle Scout", I became a Boy Scout. Our Port Arthur, TX church, Proctor Street Baptist sponsored Troop 84. Every Thursday night we learned about life, honor and being a man. We were taught how to do things in the great outdoors, and then we went out and did them! I loved it! I learned first-aid, how to swim, tie knots, canoe, shoot bows, backpack, canoe, and navigate by the stars and with a compass. Eventually, I worked my way up through the ranks, and at age 14 was awarded the coveted "Eagle" on June 28, 1966. Only 2% of scouts ever receive the highest rank. I earned two Palms after my Eagle, and was inducted into the honorary Order of the Arrow scouting program.

Beginning scouting as an 11 year old "Tenderfoot", I went to Camp Bill Stark every summer for a week each year, until 1966 when I was old enough to go on a 10 day adventure to the Philmont National Scout Ranch in New Mexico. The following year, I was selected to join five other scouts to attend the XII World Jamboree, in Farragut State Park, Idaho. I represented the Sabine Area Council, which was comprised of Beaumont, Port Arthur and Orange, TX. This was the first international jamboree ever held in the USA. The scouting program had a major positive impact on my life, as it taught me things about team work, character, values, responsibility and leadership.



Hunting squirrels in the forests of southeast Texas taught Max the skills of stalking and "woodmanship" that would serve him well later in life as he hunted big game with a bow & arrow.

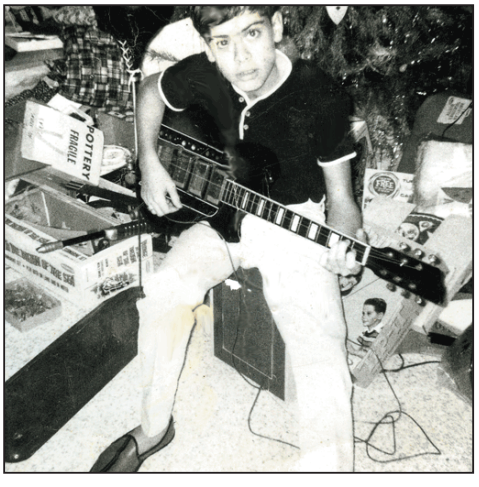
My love for creativity and art also flourished during this period of my life. I was always designing, making or building something. Thankfully, my parents and grandparents kept me supplied with art materials, tools and books. During this time, I learned to master the basic fundamentals of drawing, painting, sculpting and drafting. (I didn't know until I got to college that it was rare for someone to master all these art disciplines.)

However, my imagination was not limited to the "traditional" art forms. One Halloween, at the age of 10, I decided to dress up as the "Wolfman". So, I cut all the hair off our chocolate brown poodle and glued the curly dog hair to my face and hands! I made a wig from a plastic bag and glued the hair to it. I carved wolf fangs out of wood, painted them white and put them in my mouth! I was a sight to behold; I only wish I had a photograph! I even won the "Best Costume Award" at the neighborhood Halloween party that year. Everything was going fine until I tried "Dunking for Apples"! That was when all the dog hair fell off in the water!

Max took his first art classes at **Thomas Edison Junior High School** in Port Arthur, TX. He learned new media including "Ink Scratchboard". This drawing, or etching, was created by scratching an ink covered surface with a pin tool.

Thanks to God, my parents and grandparents, I had a wonderful adolescence. I had a great relationship with my father, who was a wise and kind man. With my mom, he laid the foundation of my life by first teaching me about Jesus. As a result, I missed the "pitfalls" that captured many of my generation. I had absolutely no interest in alcohol or drugs. "Recreational drugs" were just coming on the scene in the sixties. Like the singer, John Denver, I was getting my "high" on a mountain, and from my imagination. However, my "Excellent Adventure" was about to get better. Following my 16th year, I met a girl named Sherry who would someday be my beautiful wife and bow hunting partner!

At **Thomas Jefferson High School** in Port Arthur, TX., Max took formal art and drafting classes earning a "Letter" in Art. One watercolor created at age 16 depicted the Greiner farm house at the Woodville,TX. camp.



Max learned to play the guitar during his teenage years. He formed a band called the **"Rodents"**, inspired by the **"Beatles"** that had just come on the scene in the USA.