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WITH ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS' KEN KENDRICK

THE Western ISSUE

WITH ARIZONA HISTORIAN MARSHALL TRIMBLE

October / November 2007 \$3.99

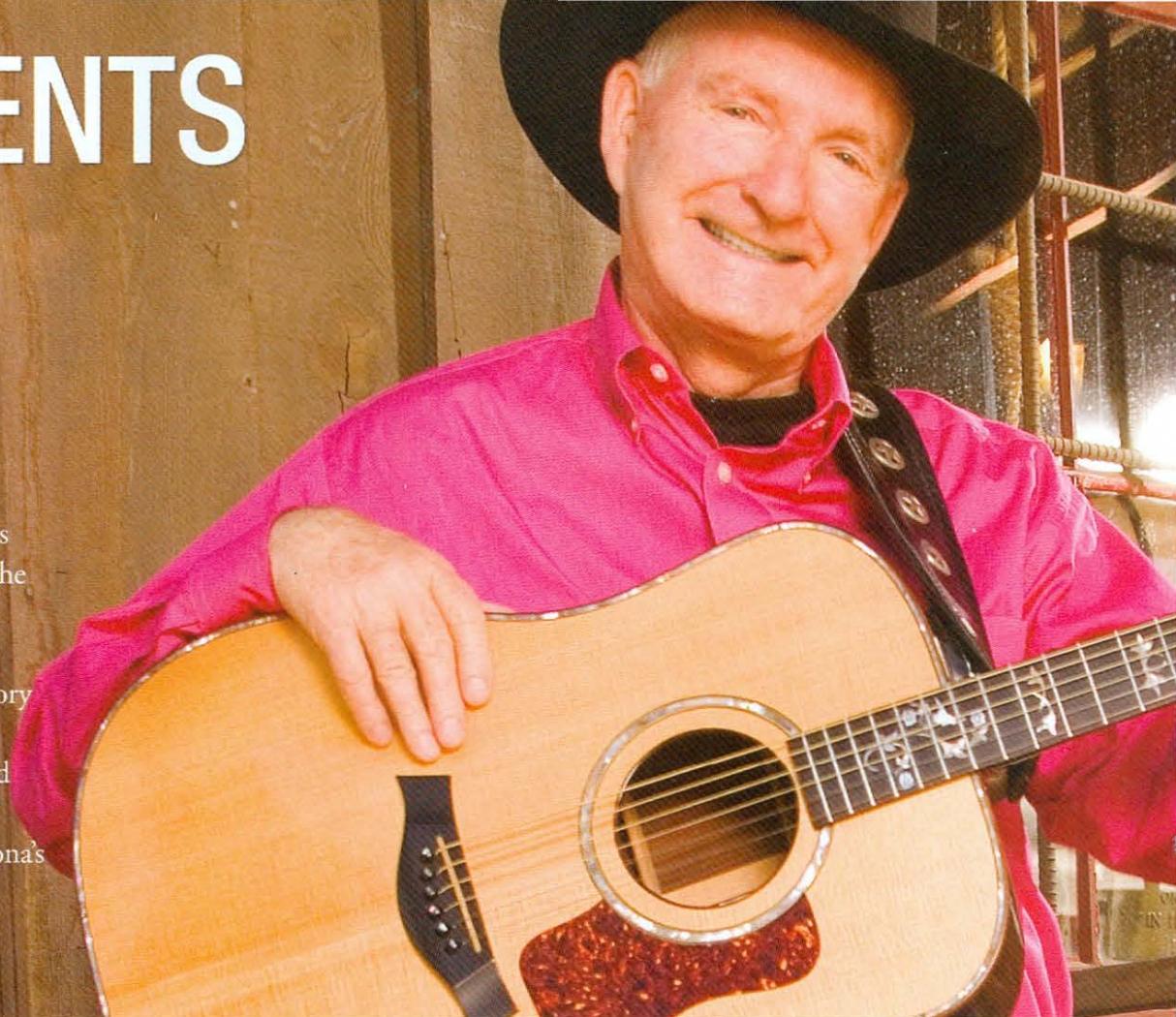


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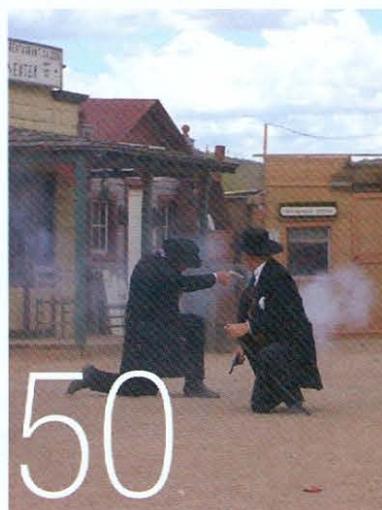
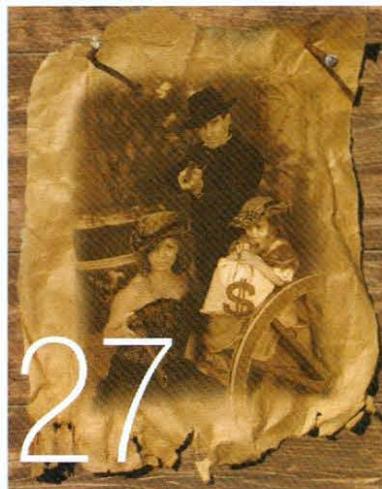
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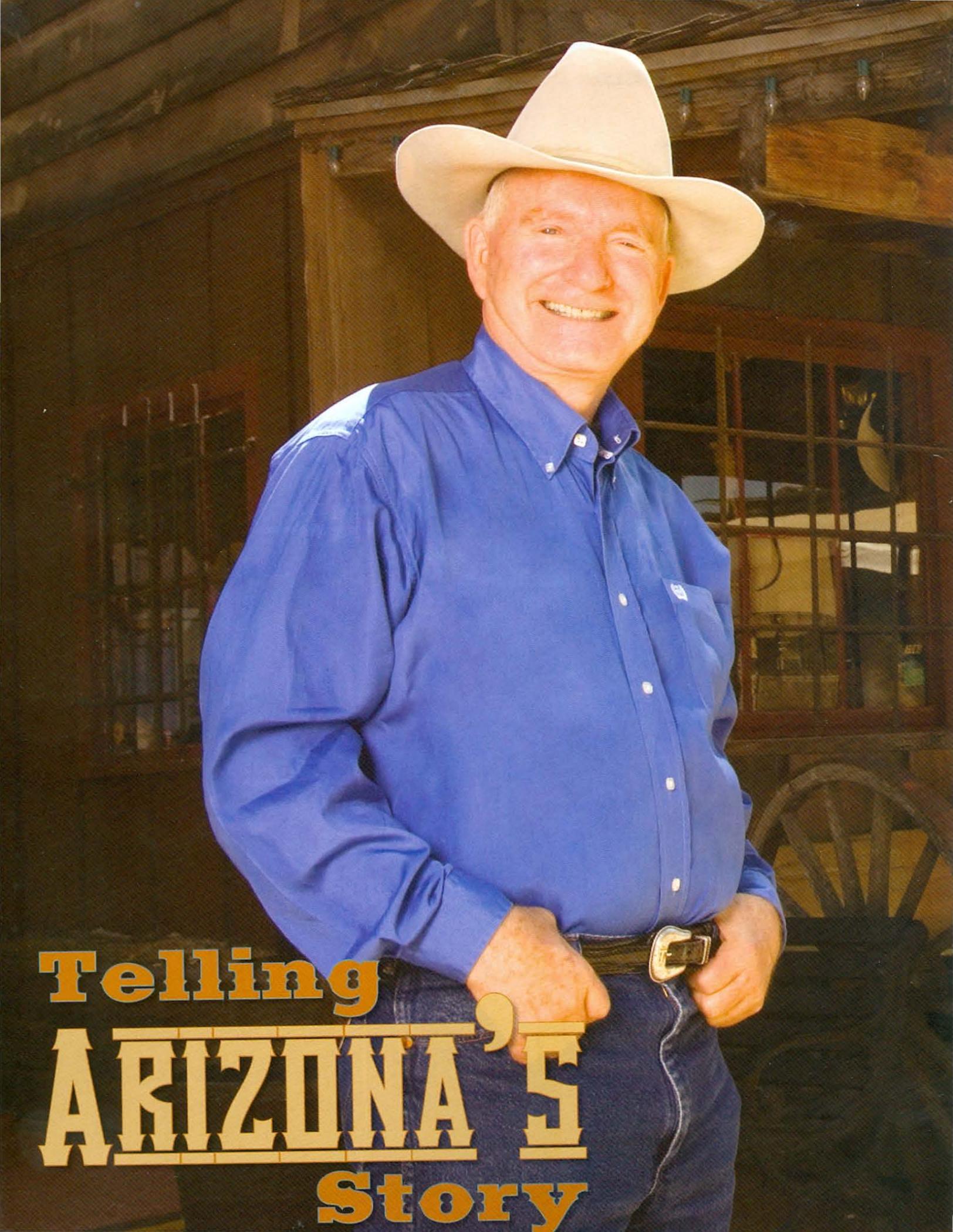
He has sung with the likes of Waylon Jennings and the Oak Ridge Boys, written twenty-one books, and taught Southwestern history for years. Read all about Marshall Trimble's life and adventures in our up and close interview with Arizona's official state historian.



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Telling
ARIZONA'S
Story



On the campus
of Scottsdale
Community College
is a professor of
Southwest Studies
whom many consider
a living treasure
trove of knowledge
and experience. His
life has entwined a
rich blend of story,
history, and folklore
of Arizona and
the Southwestern
culture. Whether
wearing his cowboy
boots and carrying
his guitar, or on the
podium in a lecture
hall, his legacy to
Arizona residents is
securely in place. His
name is Marshall
Trimble, and he is
Arizona's official
state historian.

By Gerald Calamia
Photography by Eric Fairchild
Location: Frontier Town in Cave Creek

North Valley Magazine: Historian, cowboy singer, humorist, storyteller. How did you end up wearing so many different hats?

Marshall Trimble: I like to think I'm eclectic and that I have a lot of interests. I started out as a teacher, and I immediately went into being a folk singer so I could make a little money on the side at night. I have always had a wide interest in things and I pride myself on that. My love is the Old West, and all the others have become my mistresses. I wear all these different hats but I enjoy the challenges.

NVM: Both Governor Janet Napolitano and the state of Arizona have given you a number of awards. You received the first Copper Star Award, they named you cochairman of the state's centennial, and recently presented you with a Lifetime

Achievement Award. How have your colorful past and personal experiences brought these awards into your life?

MT: I want to think it's my knowledge. I learned a long time ago when I wrote my first book that I couldn't stand up in front of all these people reading from my book. I had been only teaching history to a bunch of high-schoolers, helping them learn about the pride of history and of our country. I did this all in the '70s, and how I got away with it was that I was a folk singer. I sang songs from Bob Dylan and Johnny Cash. I think they thought, "This guy's okay. He wears America on his sleeve, yet he'll play a protest song." I still wear my boots and hat, and carry my guitar. The rest is, as they say, history. I never went looking for these awards. Through persistence and others' pleadings, the awards came to be.

NVM: You have been labeled a prolific writer, having penned twenty-one books, including your award-winning *Arizona: A Cavalcade of History*, *A Roadside History of Arizona*, and *Arizona: A Panoramic History of a Frontier State*. How did your writing develop into such a vast body of work that includes script writing, short stories, songs, and poems?

MT: My first book I didn't even intend to write. I didn't plan to be a writer. I was in my first semester teaching here at Scottsdale Community College. A lady sitting in the first row of my class said, "You should take these stories and write a book." I thought it was interesting that someone who had been sitting there in my class had the faith to believe in me. The rest of the class chimed in and said, "We love your stories." I wrote at night on an old clickety-clack typewriter. I would pretend I was presenting to the class, so the words just flowed out. It took me three to four years, since I was working a second job at night and any free time I had was used to finish the book. It initially was turned down because it wasn't scholarly. Well, in 1976, Doubleday jumped on it after a friend had submitted it for me. After the first try and having found an international publisher, it was like finding a goldmine. The book sold very well for Doubleday for about ten years. After that, I never had to go soliciting again. I eventually got work for Ted Turner's *Portrait of America* and then *Arizona Highways* came to me with their script writing.

NVM: You have a great sense of humor. What would you say had the greatest influence on it?

MT: Probably being Irish. The Irish have had such a tortured history. I think after you have been tortured so much, you have to laugh. My dad was an easygoing guy. I guess I inherited some of that from him. I have two sides to what I do. I love poignancy along with humor.

NVM: Your hometown is Ash Fork, Arizona. How was it for you to adjust to Phoenix after having spent your childhood in a small town?

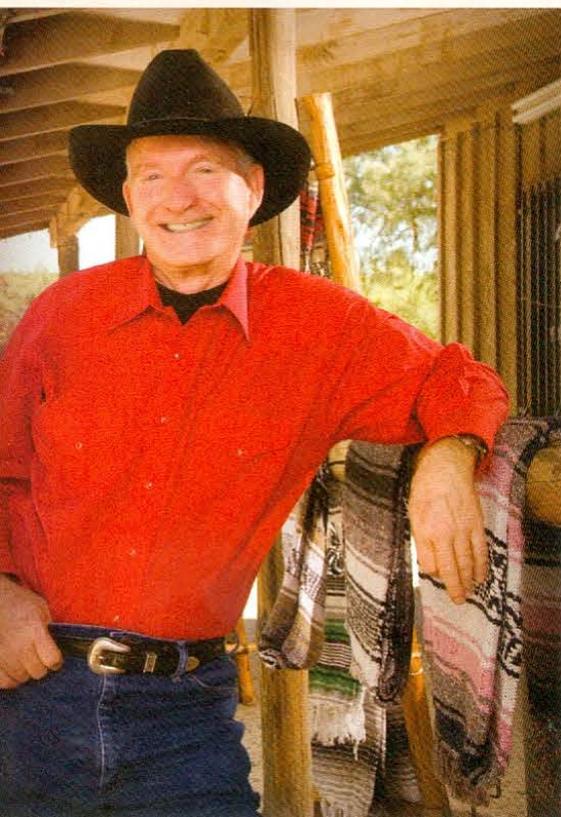
MT: It took me years to adjust. I was naturally shy, having grown up on a ranch with just my parents and my brothers. I was around kids too much. I had two brothers and I was a middle child. I liked being the middle child because I was sort of left to do my own thing. I left high school in my senior year, and there were thirty kids in the whole school. I came to Phoenix to a high school that had 3,000 [students]. The senior class had more kids and was larger than the population of my whole hometown. It was a real change. I felt light years behind. I don't think I was, but that feeling stayed with me for several years until I learned to play the guitar. It helped me mix more socially.

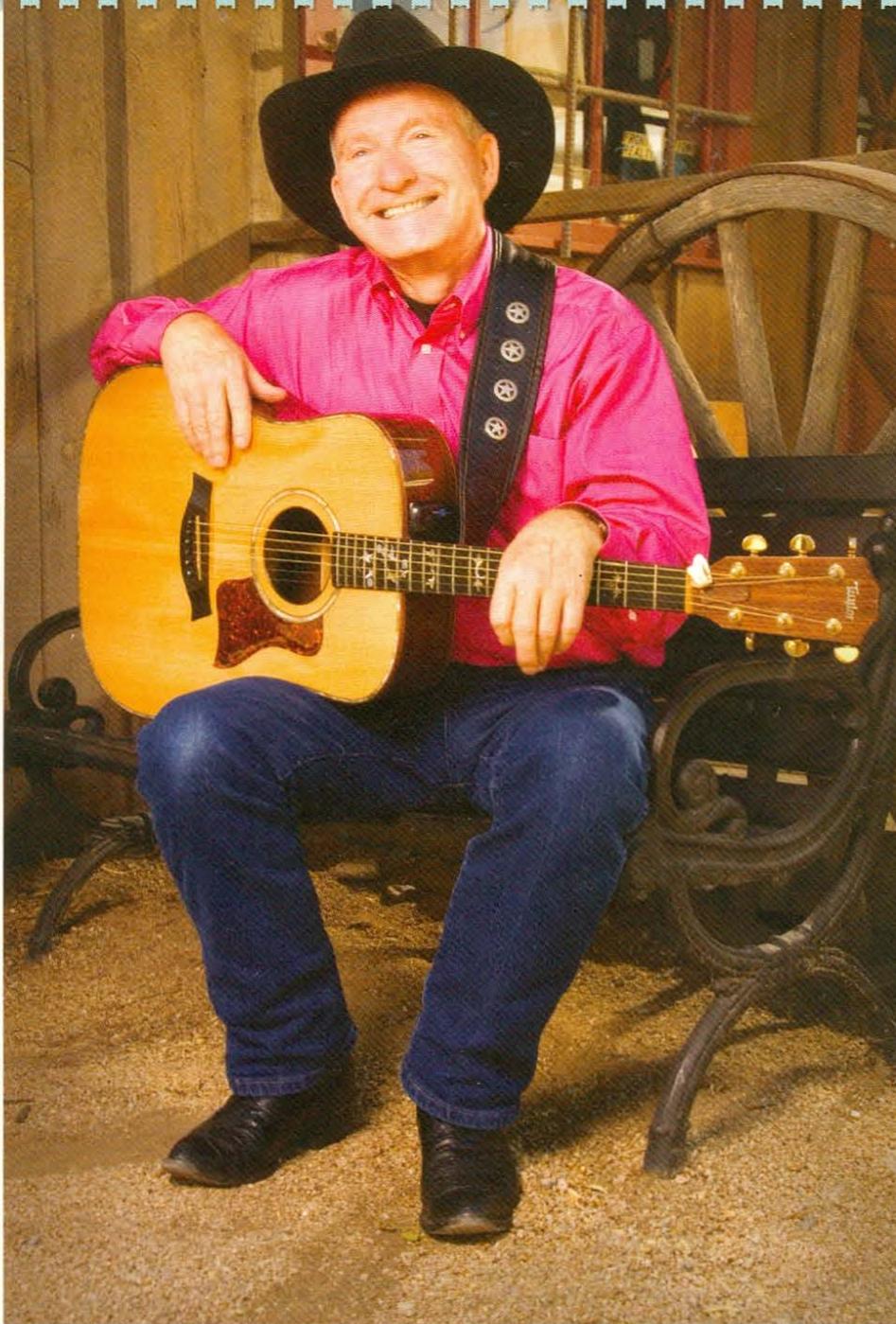
NVM: For over thirty years, you have been a banquet-convention speaker. What do you think is the main reason people seek you out for this line of work?

MT: I believe it's entertainment. The state-historian title helps me a lot of the time. I think most of the time, they want someone to entertain them who has some substance. I sing songs, tell stories, and sometimes read some poems. I think my guests feel that they go away having gotten a sample of Arizona.

NVM: You've been an entertainer, having played with Rex Allen, Jerry Lee Lewis, Waylon Jennings, and the Oak Ridge Boys. Going back to your purchase of the \$5 Gibson, which you later traded in along with \$25 to upgrade to a Martin in 1959, did you know then how much a part of your life music and guitars would become?

MT: Not then. When I first started, I must have been awful. I remember after my first lesson, my teacher sent me home. He wouldn't even take money. I think that made me more determined. I started playing some Johnny Cash records. I would sing behind him. I played through college. I remember I started teaching and I was going broke fast. I was at a bar and met a folk group. They asked me to get up on stage and play a song. I played a song called





really trained me to communicate. I don't know where else I could have gotten such a wonderful experience.

NVM: What goals or events do you have set for yourself in the future?

MT: I want to stay healthy. This is the only body I get. I still work out. I've outlived my older brother and my younger brother. I want to be healthy so I can keep doing what I do. If I'm not healthy, I'll have to retire. I want to be able to work until I go to the long sleep.

NVM: What is the future you see for the state of Arizona?

MT: Obviously, it is going to keep growing. The climate is going to keep people coming to Arizona. The lifestyle is so great here. People will always want to keep coming here. I hope that there will be people like me to teach them to respect the culture of what we have here in Arizona!

NVM: What do you feel is the best way to serve history and continue its influence on others?

MT: Make it interesting. Bring out history's color and pride. It's okay to bring out even if it's negative. No country is perfect. For whatever we did wrong, our country shines among most for its greatness. We are a work in progress, like democracy.

NVM: What book, story, song, joke, or poem best describes your life, and which best describes Arizona?

MT: "The Minstrel Song" by Dean Cook. It is a story of how the gentleman in the song was influenced by stories told by his father and the people all around him. The one I would pick for Arizona would be another song by Dean Cook "Tall Tales and Lost Mines." We sort of live in Arizona by our myths and images, and of course our legends.

NVM: As a part of Arizona's great history, what will you be best remembered for?

MT: I want people to say, "He was a teacher." Performer is good, a writer is good, but I would like best to be remembered as someone who taught people. I don't mean just a classroom teacher either. I mean a teacher of Arizonan, Western, and American history. That's what I want my legacy to be. 🍷

"Scotch and Soda." Luck has always been on my side. That night the band, which was a trio, had lost one of their guys who had been thrown in jail. I wandered into that bar, and a week later I was in the group. When the other guy got out of jail, they told him they didn't need him anymore and he moved on. Since then, music has been a big part of my life.

NVM: You said that joining the United States Marine Corps in 1957 is one of the most significant things you did in your life. Along with your strong sense of patriotism and ethics, what else did your time in the Marines instill in you?

MT: It instilled in me perseverance and helped

me to accomplish things I thought I couldn't do. The Marines taught me that showing up and not quitting until the job is done is important. Marine boot camp was one of the most important times of my life. [I was told], "You can do anything you set out to do, Trimble."

NVM: How has teaching helped you to share your experiences?

MT: Teaching is communication. It is really all about communication. I remember a professor at college having taught me that one of the greatest things in life you can learn is to be able to communicate well. Whether with your wife, friends and family, or students. Teaching