

Rocks of Age

By Pete Clark

During the summer of 1953, we moved from out in the valley, near Lost Wells Buttes, into Shoshoni. My Dad had rented an apartment in a duplex located in the area of Shoshoni known as MK. The houses and duplexes in MK had been built by Morrison Knudsen Company to house their employees during the construction of Boysen Dam on the Wind River, at the mouth of Wind River Canyon, north of Shoshoni. Shoshoni was a great metropolitan city, at least six blocks square. It had a movie theater and the best malts and milkshakes in America were available at the Yellowstone Drug Store downtown.

I wandered around town, exploring, like Frank Buck, without the jungle, learning what was there. I had noticed a long, one story building that looked deserted, just off of the main drag, behind the Barber Shop. After passing the building a few times during my rambling, I gave in to my curiosity and walked to the door, cupped my hands around my eyes, peering through the glass in the door. I saw a man in the rear of the room standing over a machine. Being the shy, retiring person that I was and am, I went through the door, walked to where the man was working and asked what he was doing. He said he was cutting a slice of apple green jade from a large piece he had found on South Pass and he wanted to know who was being so nosy. I introduced myself and he said his name was Chuck Dutton. Finishing his task, he turned off the slab saw and gave me a tour of his shop, showing me fossils, and semi-precious stones. In my awkward, stumbling way, I had discovered a good friend and mentor.

Chuck taught me to use the equipment and techniques for changing pieces of rock into often beautiful jewelry. He also taught me to use a piece of deer antler and a piece of leather to chip arrow heads from flint and agate. He used pieces of ruby glass dinner plate to create colorful arrowheads. The Tribal Councils on the Wind River Reservation asked Chuck if he would go to the Reservation and teach the art of making arrowheads to Arapahoe and Shoshone youths. Chuck agreed to do this, but unfortunately it was the mid-fifties and none of the boys were interested in learning one of their ancestors' fading arts.

I still have some of the things Chuck gave to me or sold to me for a pittance. I have some unfinished dinosaur bone, pieces of jade, agate, tiger eye and a finished cab of carnelian agate from Brazil, along with a faceted artificial ruby. The jewelry I made has been given away or lost over the last sixty years.

Every fall, Chuck would leave for Mexico to avoid the Wyoming winters. He said he had a *mamacita* there who cared for him should he become ill. One spring, he did not return.