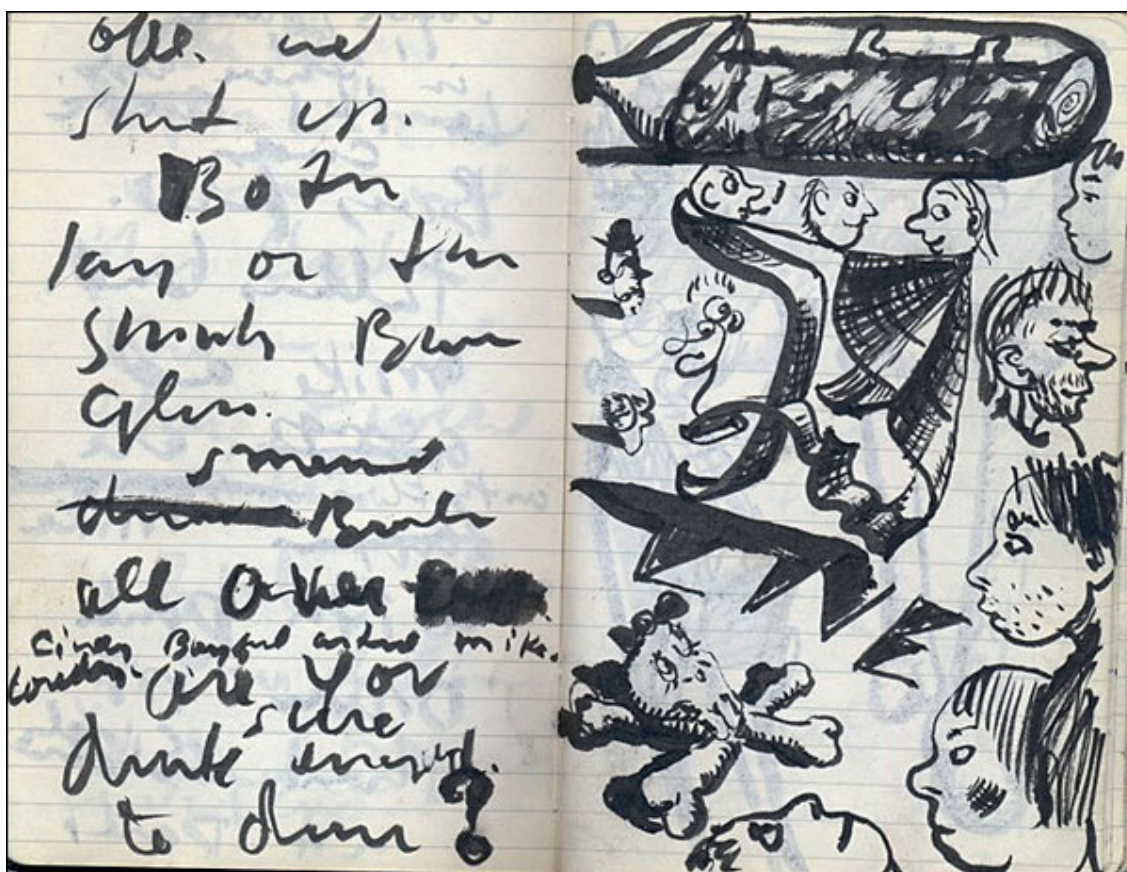
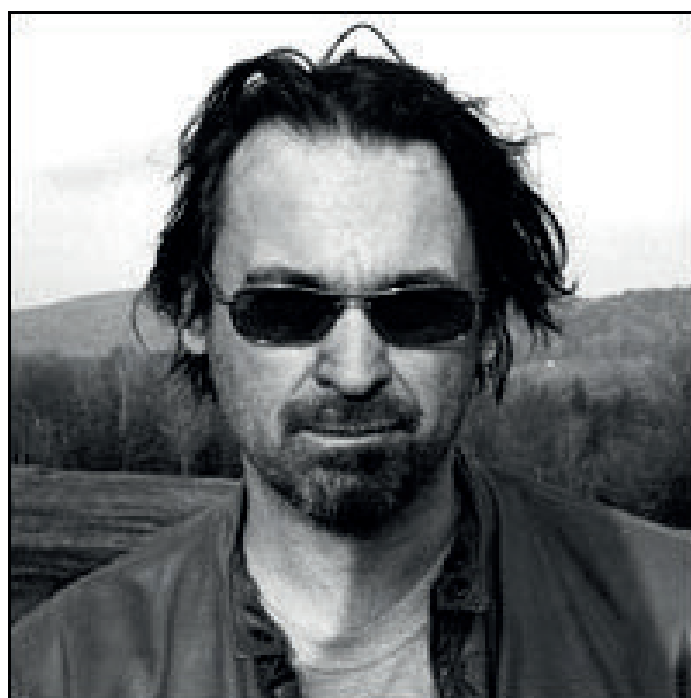


National Public Radio (NRP) : 'Joe Andoe, An Artist's Wild Tales', By Rick Karr, September 4th, 2007



Andoe's manuscripts for the book feature miniature illustrations alongside



Joe Andoe
Sam Andoe



Untitled, 2002
Joe Andoe



Untitled, 2003
Sam Andoe

Painter Joe Andoe has lived in New York for more than 20 years, but he never stopped thinking about his hometown. Tulsa, Okla., is where Andoe built a reputation as a wild man and party animal — it also inspires his paintings. Andoe has cleaned up his act and written a memoir, *Jubilee City*, about his journey from juvenile delinquency to a successful career in art.

Back in the early 1970s, Andoe never would have dreamed of himself as an artist. He and his friends concentrated their efforts on partying: drinking whiskey, popping pills, dropping acid, smoking pot and driving fast.

In his memoir, he recalls the first time he got drunk: "It was the birth of my other," he writes. "My new gear, an alternate personality, and my grandiosity was actualized and attainable. At last I had mastered the low art of coming unmoored."

During the next few years, Andoe was busted for reckless driving and drug possession. He and his friends wrecked cars and motorcycles. Some of those friends died; others went to prison.

Andoe says that when he moved to New York and started telling stories about what he had done back in Tulsa, his new friends thought he was exaggerating. He says his memoir has drawn the same response: One guy couldn't possibly have gotten into so much trouble.

Everybody knew that Andoe had a lot of talent, but nobody — not even Andoe — thought his talent had any practical use beyond entertaining people at parties.

He had always loved to draw, but two things kept Andoe from imagining an art career. The first was money: He needed a good job, a steady income. The second was ignorance: Art was something that women did, not men.

When Andoe enrolled at a community college to study agricultural business, an elective in art history made him reconsider.

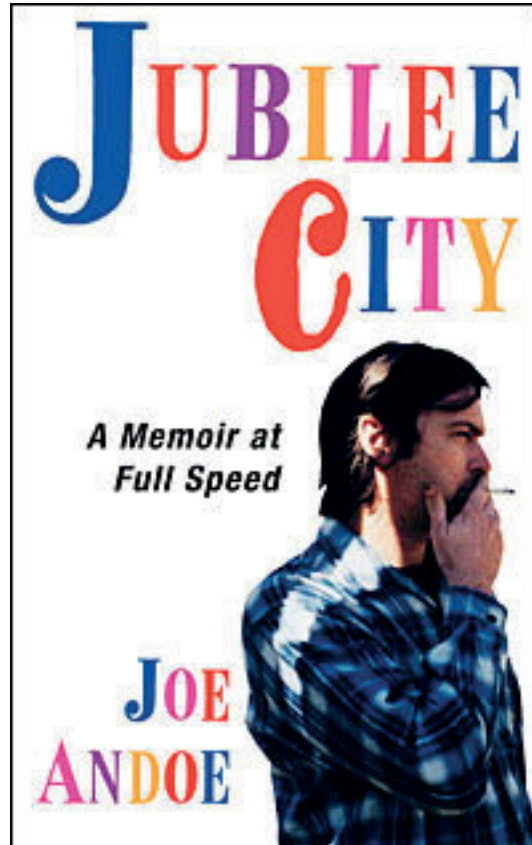
"I saw that there were guys [such as] Robert Smitson, Dennis Oppenheim — guys who wore cowboy boots, guys who looked like me — doing this stuff," Andoe recalls. "I didn't really understand what they were doing, but they kind of looked like construction workers, like me and my friends, and they were doing this and it looked like they were havin' fun."

Andoe changed his major and eventually earned a master's degree in art, pushing his work on museums when he visited New York.

He married a woman who supported him while he built his career, even after the couple moved to New York and had kids. But he also kept up his wild ways, consuming too much whiskey and cocaine. His career fared pretty well, but his marriage fell apart.

Andoe is sober today, still painting and now publishing his stories. *Jubilee City* started out as a series of short, autobiographical vignettes that he printed himself. A publisher asked him to write more for the book that ended up in stores. Andoe is currently working on a large mural commissioned for a new building in Tulsa, and is scheduled to show a new batch of paintings at his New York gallery next spring.

Excerpt: 'Jubilee City: A Memoir at Full Speed'



FENCE

I was in the backyard of our new rented house in Tulsa, and on the other side of the fence that separated our yard from the people behind was a bunch of little kids, a babysitter's bunch.

I was four or five and talking to a kid, about like me, through the gray diamond-shaped links.

Can you come over and play? he goes.

I don't know, I said. I'll go ask my mama.

So I did and she said, You know they look close but they're really far away.

I remember wondering, Does the fence act like a telescope or a magnifying thing?

Around the same time my twenty-five-year-old mother took me to the grocery store in a hurry. We parked and it was crowded. She put me up on top of a fiberglass horse

and dropped a nickel in the box and the horse ground back and forth for a few minutes. Then it stopped. Disoriented, I thought she forgot me and I ran out into the sun and the parking lot looking for her.

Then a friendly old man came out of nowhere, took my hand, and walked me away and smiled as I said, No, she's back there.

He said that we would find her this way.

Looking back toward the store I told the man my address and phone number like my mother taught me to if I ever got lost. We turned the corner and went into a liquor store where he was familiar with the woman who worked there.

Right away she picked up the phone book as I told her my address and phone number.

I was thinking, Why is she looking in the phone book?

Then she made a call. Then the old man and I sat on the curb in the shade in front of the liquor store and we talked to the lady as we waited for something.

Very soon a black - and - white police car pulled up. It had a big gold star on the door. I got in the front seat.

I was too small to see over the dash but I could see the curly black rubber cord (like for a telephone, but thicker) going from the radio to the hand microphone he was talking into, and I saw his big silver pistol in a black holster. I tried to tell him my address but he said he already knew. How does he know? I wondered.

Then we pulled up to my grandparents' house.

Out front stood my smiling grandma and my not happy red - eyed mother who I was so glad to see. I jumped out of the police car and ran to her but she didn't smile or hug or anything; she said, Get in the house.

And yes, I wondered why she wasn't glad to see me.

BABY NEEDS SHOES

I was dropped or suffocated or abused or deprived of something, all at the hands of her evil sadistic doctor.

This was what I was told any time I messed up or got poor grades, and I did mess up a lot and I was usually the last to know.

In 1955, when this all started, my mother, Lois, was a nineteen - year - old cutie with red painted toenails and jet black hair and alabaster skin, a gum - popping bank teller who was voted "Best Figure" by the other tellers.

That was before she got pregnant with me while on her honeymoon in San Diego,

shouting distance from the naval base where Dad was stationed before he took off for Japan for almost two years.

I looked like I'd been in a fight by the time she saw me hours after my noon delivery, she said.

They had knocked her out because I was so big—almost ten pounds—and she was only five foot three.

So she never trusted that I was okay.

The high point of my birthday, besides being born, was that my first visitor was a famous Indian artist named Acee Blue Eagle, who was a traditionalist and a writer and a performer. He had toured Europe before World War II and performed for Queen Elizabeth when she was a child, and Mussolini, and Hitler, who might have got the idea for his swastika from a symbol of friendship (turned the other way) that was in Acee's exhibit.

At these performances Acee wore full headdress, buckskins, and moccasins, and played Indian flutes and tom - toms. He would dance and sing Indian songs and tell stories and show his paintings and medicine.

Then there's Walt Disney, who wasn't there, but we did share the same birthday. Walt took Bambi from Acee. I was told that, years earlier, on a trip to New Mexico, he saw Acee's deer paintings that looked like Bambi.

Acee was a friend of the family and worked at home not far away. He saw me before anybody else did, and maybe put some kind of Indian spell or medicine on me, because he was that kind of guy. And I could draw pretty well early on, and I drew a lot of Indians.

Mom's best friend Jane had a girl a few months before I came along and like all baby girls she looked more advanced than me.

I didn't seem to be as engaged as Jane's baby, plus I was so big—all of this was part of my mother's reason for thinking that I was defective.

They say I was a good baby, hardly fussed; I would lie there and entertain myself. And this worked for my mom because she wasn't cuddly anyway.

So here we have this twenty - year - old mother with her groom on the other side of the world and what she thought was a big slug of a baby.

She lived at her mother's, who had remarried just a few years before to a drunk just because he went to the right church and they were the only people being allowed into

heaven.

My grandmother's second husband, Charlie, was a silver-haired runt. He was an old newspaperman who had lived and worked in the old days at the newspaper in Muskogee, Oklahoma, on the back way from the north down to Texas. Early on he had interviewed Baby Face Nelson and Machine Gun Kelly. When he was a cub reporter, he had interviewed Will Rogers.

Charlie had probably been a drunk then, too, and he fumbled around nervously because Will was one of the biggest stars in America then and was from Oklahoma. Will took kindly to Charlie and took over the interview, saying, Now you're supposed to ask me this, and then I say that, then you come back with this, so on and so forth.

One of Will's quotes was, Eating is underrated because you only go to war once in your life but you eat three times a day.

Charlie was a bitter sarcastic old drunk by the time I got to know him.

And my grandmother wasn't in the moment. She rocked back and forth in time, living on a cocktail of diet pills, church, and the stress of enabling her alcoholic husband. They had a son who was four when I was born: Larry, my half-uncle, walked at ten months and was bright but a brat. He was cruel and abusive like his dear old dad who pitted us against each other.

Mom was scared of her little half-brother and of Charlie and of her mother and of poverty and of Jesus and of uncertainty and that I might be defective, and she worried if her husband would still love her when he got back from Japan and the navy.

When she went back to work, she left me with Dorothy, a woman down the street whose husband was an undertaker and who had to watch too many kids besides the four of her own.

It was stressful there and it wasn't a good place for me. I remember watching TV all day and in the evening sitting, looking out the front window, waiting to be picked up.

But a lot of times it wasn't any better at home than at Dorothy's because my parents were young and so overextended and stressed with Joe, my dad, going to college and working and my mother working full-time.

My mother has said that she didn't see me from when I was six till I was eighteen. My only explanation is that I tried to stay the hell out of the way. Maybe it was Pavlovian; my feet wouldn't take me there unless they had to.

I would come home from school and check the pH of the house—my presence depended on the reading I got.

With all this freedom I would wander around and get into things. The first time I had a run-in with the police I was five or six and I was walking up the grassy alley behind

our house.

I was inspecting a neighbor's brick incinerator, a roughly three - foot - square open - topped box.

It was missing a couple of bricks and I remember how surprised and proud I was as I dismantled it by hand. Then I walked around the corner and saw the girl from next door. I made her promise not to tell anyone I had superpowers and if she didn't believe me to go and see for herself.

As fast as her little legs could walk she went and told on me and so the police came to my house.

Around the same time I got a bow and arrow with steel practice tips. I had seen a movie where Indians shot arrows at the sky and that looked like a good idea so I went into our shady backyard and shot my arrows over our house, almost hitting the man sweeping his driveway across the street. That could have killed him.

I never did get in trouble from them for the big stuff.

Now back to Charlie.

I have to be fair and say that he didn't think he was so bad. Like when he would drunkenly tell me about that cold December day when he and my mom brought me home from the hospital and took me all around town, showing me off to people they hadn't seen since.

He could be charming the way a drunk can.

Here are some examples of the joy he brought into my world.

Every Sunday he would manage to get stinking drunk in the thirty minutes between church and dinner. At dinner he'd hog the spotlight, repeating the same things again and again.

One of his favorites goes like this: I'm going to get a farm. I'm going to move out of the city and have goats, chickens, and cows. . . . Et cetera. Then he would allocate the chores to Larry and me. It was the same thing each week.

This stressed my parents.

And one time my father raged on the way home in the car, saying how would Charlie work a farm when he can't even clip his toenails.

So the very next week when Charlie said, I'm going to get a farm, I interrupted him and said, with my chin just over my plate of mashed potatoes and roast beef, Granddad Charlie, you aren't ever going to get a farm; you can't even clip your toenails.

My father jerked me out of the chair and boy, did I get it.

The next week Charlie was as drunk as always, but he didn't talk about the farm and after dinner he said he wanted to take me and Larry to the Lake View amusement park.

Man, did I want to go.

We had driven past it many times and I had seen the colored lights and the Ferris wheel at night and I studied the ads and I loved the way they looked with the letters all different colors and tilting all funny. It looked like the most fun place on earth, but it cost money and we were short of that.

So when Charlie said he wanted to take me and Larry, my mother looked nervous and said no. I pleaded and begged until she gave in and I ran out to Charlie's big car and climbed into the front seat and sat in the middle where the soles of my tennis shoes pointed straight out at the vents on the air conditioner below the dash. It was a pretty hot day and when we parked in the gravel parking lot, Charlie turned off the car and looked down at me and I smelled his whisky breath and he said, Look at those shoes. You look like a tramp. I'm not taking you in there.

I climbed into the backseat and watched them out the rear window as they walked under that sign I couldn't read, but I could tell by all the different colored letters and the funny way they tilted that it said "Lake View."

And then I climbed back into the front seat and sat in the middle and waited and looked at my shoes.