Treehouse Silver – Connie and Fred Libby of Tombstone, Arizona

For four generations, mining and ranching have been the lifeblood of the Escapule family. The legacy began in 1877, when John Escapule, originally from the Basque country in France, arrived in Arizona with his parents. His parents would soon return to France, but not before leaving young John with the wagon and the mule team. Joe Trapman pictured below was John Escapule's brother-in-law.



Joe Trappman—Freight wagons and team—1914

Resourceful and driven, John built a life for himself, first working as an interpreter at Fort Huachuca and hauling timber for local mines with the wagon and mule team his parents left with him. He acquired mining claims across the hills of Tombstone, Arizona, as well as a vast cattle ranch in Texas. The ranch also produced oil, providing royalties to John and the next generation for many years.

John was one of Tombstone's early settlers. By 1980, the family had grown to a sprawling clan of 180 members. To the outside world, their history is an extraordinary piece of Western lore. To Connie, it is the story of her family and the roots that shaped her life.

Connie met Fred Libby in the early 1980s, when her father, Charles "Charlie" Escapule, and her uncle Louis Escapole hired him at the State of Maine Mining Company near Tombstone, a family-owned and operated mining business. The two later married.

Fred enjoyed the refining work and was struck by the beauty of the silver crystals it produced. Rather than melting them all into bars, he used part of his paycheck to buy some of the most beautiful specimens from the mine. He put them in small glass serum vials and showed them to Uncle Louis, who remarked, "Those are really nice. A man could probably make some money selling those." That simple observation planted the seed for what would become Treehouse Silver.

By the 1980s, falling silver prices had made mining unprofitable for many silver mines, including the family's operation near Tombstone. The mine closed.

Fred began consulting on small gold mining projects in North and South America. His work covered the process from running heap leach operations to recovering gold for the mine owners. Work often took him away from home, and Connie and their young children missed having him there.

Together, they began looking for a way to build a business that would keep the family together while continuing the work they enjoyed. They shared a fascination with silver and gold and loved working with

the metals. The silver crystals offered a starting point for a wholesale business, supplying stores with products to sell to their customers.



Inside Fred Libby's workshop, this enclosed lab operated 24 hours a day for 20 years. Fred set it up and kept it running, producing beautiful silver and copper crystals year after year.

Before Treehouse Silver, Fred worked with Connie's brother Mike Escapule and John Gibbs under the name Going to the Sun Mining Company. Together, they began making and selling poured silver pieces, including Tombstone bars, Kit Kats, one-ounce ore cars, one-ounce headstones, and half-ounce cactus designs.

When Mike and John lost interest, Fred continued the work. He and Connie sold poured silver bars, silver bullets, and vials of silver crystals to shops in Tombstone and Bisbee under the tagline "Tombstone Silver." Both the crystals and the poured bars were made from silver recovered at the State of Maine Mining Company near Tombstone.

Each piece was stamped by hand, one letter or number at a time. Mistakes sometimes sent a piece back to be remelted or into the scrap jar. The ore cars proved especially difficult to remove from their molds without damaging their shape, so relatively few were made.







The headstone design came with a story of its own. The mold was borrowed from Jade Hummel, who was staying in the nearby Dragoon Mountains. With his permission, they had it duplicated at a local machine shop. They later learned he was a wanted bank robber.

By the 1990s, Fred was growing silver and copper crystals around the clock, fascinated by how changes in temperature and chemistry could produce dramatically different formations. Finding a market for the crystals was a challenge.



Fred's mother returned from Austria with an idea: gold leaf suspended in liquid inside a bottle. Connie and Fred added small gold bottles to their line alongside their silver crystal vials.

As silver prices rose, the crystal vials became too expensive for the gift shops they supplied, so they began using silver leaf instead. Vials of gold and silver have remained a mainstay of Treehouse Silver for more than thirty years, allowing Connie and Fred to continue working with the metals they love while running the business from home. Supplies arrive from their vendors, and finished products go out to their customers—all from their own property. As Connie puts it, "We love our life."



[Photo: Treehouse Silver products]

Decades later, the market for their early creations took an unexpected turn when Connie's brother, Bailey Escapole, decided to sell his collection of State of Maine Mine ten-ounce silver bars and silver crystals, which he had acquired while working at the mine.

Connie and Fred bought the silver from Bailey at spot price, and their son, Jason Libby, listed the vintage ten-ounce bars and silver crystals on eBay. The listings drew considerable attention, including questions from collectors about the State of Maine Mining Company logo. Family records, newspaper articles, and firsthand knowledge of the mine helped establish the pieces' origins.



Charles Bailey Escapule (brother of Connie Libby) is a fourth-generation Tombstone native, a geological engineer, and an artist. He is the son of Charles "Charlie" Bernard Escapule, a third-generation miner who operated the historic State of Maine Mine in Tombstone alongside his family.



(1980's) Beautiful Pure Silver Crystal Specimen 4.2 Grams State Of Maine Mining Co Silver in Tombstone, Arizona. These were part of Connie's family's estate who were in the mining industry in Tombstone Arizona since the 1890's. From the Bailey Escapule & Fred Libby Jr Collection. This crystal was saved from being melted into bars for their personal collection.

For Connie and Fred, discovering that both the silver from their family's mining days and their early poured pieces—including ore cars, headstones, bars, and cactuses—had become sought after collectibles was a delightful surprise.

Today, looking back on a lifetime in a notoriously tough and demanding industry, Connie embraces getting older and the perspective it brings. Although the mining world has changed since her family's days at the State of Maine Mining Company, she still follows it closely, watching with interest as larger mining companies and junior miners alike return to Tombstone to investigate copper deposits and the potential for a major silver discovery.

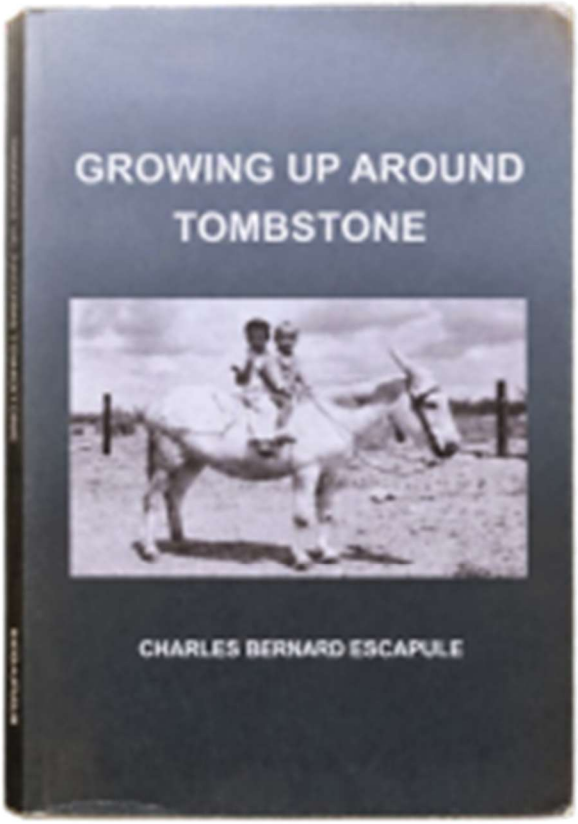
Her son, Jason, has taken a deep interest in preserving the Escapule family archives. For Connie, it has been a joy to look back through the generations. What others see as an extraordinary Tombstone story is, to her family, a treasured family tradition.

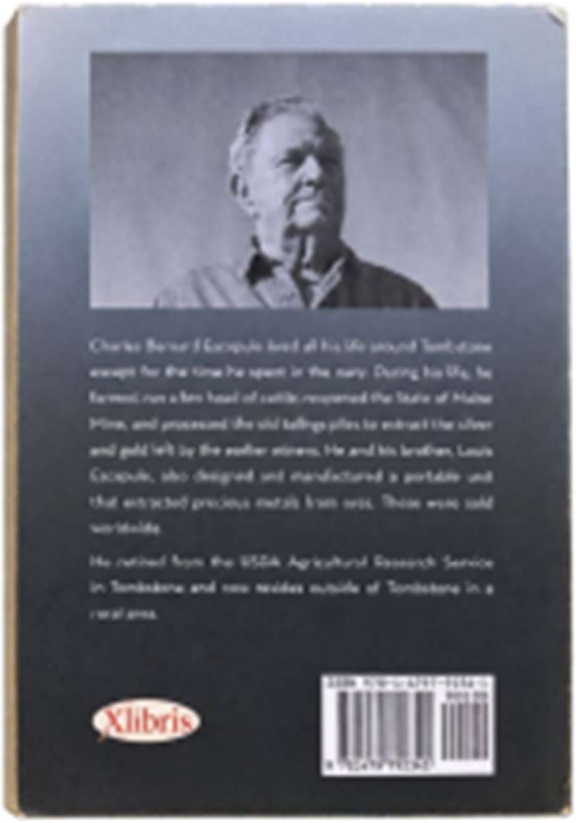


John Escapule, Emma(Trappman) Escapule, and John Herman Escapule



Charles Henry Elliott, Mildred Elliott, and Susie Twomey Elliott





THE FIVE FOSTERS



Betty Foster Escapule



I spent most of my childhood at the Wolf Place, now known as the San Pedro House. At that time it was part of a large thriving cattle ranch. I lived at the Wolf Place longer than anyone else with the exception of my father who left a year after I married.

I went to school at Buena when it was a one room school house and attended high school in Tombstone. I married Charlie Escapule, a Tombstone native, and we had five children.

We currently reside outside of Tombstone. Neither Charlie nor I have ever lived in town.

Betty Foster Escapule