Denny Cresap

Veteran, Entrepreneur & Philanthropist

Chapter 01 –
Introduction

Announcer: Through strong friendships, hard work, and pure salesmanship, entrepreneur Denny Cresap grew a one-truck, one-employee beer distributorship in Bartlesville into one of Anheuser-Busch's top 20 distributors in the United States. Premium Beers of Oklahoma became a large, multi-location company providing services to 27 counties in the state prior to its sale in 2012.

With proceeds from the sale, Cresap and his family established the Cresap Family Foundation, awarding over $10 million to more than 90 nonprofit agencies.

A native of Chicago, Illinois, Cresap moved to Oklahoma in 1952. He enrolled at the University of Oklahoma and, during his junior year, joined the United States Army then, he served three years overseas before returning to the state to begin his business career.

During his oral history interview, Denny talks about his $3,000 used truck, how Budweiser came to Grand Lake, Clydesdales, and why making friends is so important.

Hear Denny now on VoicesOfOklahoma.com and podcast.

Chapter 02 – 6:40
Military Academy

John Erling (JE): My name is John Erling, and today's date is November 9th, 2015. So, Denny, would you state your full name, please?

Denny Cresap (DC): My name's Charles Dennis Cresap.

JE: Okay, everybody knows you as Denny. Got to ask you how it came about using Denny or Dennis rather than Charles.

DC: Well, my father and mother, especially my father, thought I'd go by my middle name, and it was Dennis, and he thought I might be an author someday, so he came up with the idea of my pen name would be Charles Dennis. But I go by Denny.

JE: Was he a writer himself?

DC: No, sir. He never wrote anything.

JE: All right. What is your date of birth?

DC: October 20th, 1934.

JE: And that makes your present age?

DC: 81 years old.

JE: All right, and we're recording this interview here in the recording facilities of VoicesOfOklahoma.com. So tell us where you were born.

DC: I was born in Chicago. Chicago, Illinois.

JE: Let's talk about your mother, your mother's name, and where she came from.

DC: My mother's name was Gwendolyn Atchison, and she was born in Kansas City, Missouri.

JE: What kind of personality would you give her?

DC: She was very vivacious and liked to meet people and be involved with people, and she worked for 20 years when we lived in Veneta for the mental hospital in Veneta, placing people in nursing homes.

JE: Do you think you draw any traits yourself from her?

DC: Yes, yes, probably I do. I like to meet people and enjoy visiting with people and making connections.

JE: And that's what she was like?

DC: She was like that.

JE: All right, so then your father's name?

DC: Charles Laverne Cressop. And where did he grow up? Well, he was born in Trenton, Missouri, and then he went to school at the Platt Business College in St. Joe, Missouri.

JE: So then describe his personality.

DC: He liked people, and he played semi-pro basketball for the college there in St. Joe, Missouri.

JE: All right, and so he too was outgoing.

DC: Yes, both of them were very outgoing, and he started his career working for Armour and Company in St. Joe, Missouri, and then after that he got transferred to Kansas City to the Stockyards.

JE: So you couldn't help yourself? You couldn't help yourself by getting out there. If you had two people who wanted to get out and meet people, you were destined to do that.

DC: Right, and they met at the Kansas City Stockyards. My dad was with Armored, like I said, and my mother worked for a commission company there in the Exchange Building.

JE: So the Stockyards brought your parents together?

DC: Brought them together, and they started dating, and they used to go to, like to go to the Mule Bock Hotel in downtown Kansas City for lunch.

JE: Yeah. So then how did they end up in Chicago, since you said you were born there?

DC: Well, Armour and Company transferred my parents to Chicago in the early 1930s, and he ended up being the head calf buyer for Armour and Company in Chicago.

JE: Okay. Did you have brothers and sisters?

DC: I had one brother. I'm four years older than my brother, Henry Keith Cressip, and he goes by the name Keith.

JE: And is he still living today?

DC: Yes, he is. He lives in Veneta, Oklahoma. He's retired from the insurance business.

JE: All right. So how long were you around the Veneta area, your family?

DC: My parents moved to Veneta in 1951 after my dad retired from Armour and Company. I was in Chicago at Morgan Park Military Academy, and that was between my junior and senior year. So I stayed in Chicago to finish my senior year of military school.

JE: You were born in 1934. We had the stock market crash, the beginning of the Depression, ends in 1932. You weren't even born yet. But did your family get affected by the Depression, and how were they affected?

DC: Well, they really weren't affected very much. He had such a good job with the Armour and Company that we knew that, I guess, the Depression was going on in Chicago, but he wasn't affected like a lot of people were.

JE: Was there a foster child by the name of June?

DC: Yes. While we lived in Chicago, we would take in foster children, and they would live with us. June was one of the girls, and she went to Calumet High School and took care of my brother and I at this young age.

JE: Okay. So you had foster children in and out of your home.

DC: Yes. And that was there on the south side of Chicago.

JE: Many of them then went on to live good lives and all?

DC: Yes. There were two or three girls. It lived with us when my brother and I were younger.

JE: So then your education, your elementary school, where was that?

DC: I was in Palos Heights, Illinois.

JE: And then on to junior high and to high school. What high school did you graduate from?

DC: I went to Morgan Park Military Academy on the south side of Chicago.

JE: Tell us about that, Morgan Park Military Academy. Why there, and what was that about?

DC: Well, friends of my parents, the Thralls that lived on Beverly Hills on the south side of Chicago, their son and son-in-law both went to Morgan Park Military Academy, and they suggested that my father and mother send me to the school. And it was kind of the in thing right after the Second World War for young men to go to military school.

Some had to go because they got in trouble, and some went just to be able to go to the military school. And our uniforms were just like West Point.

JE: Okay. So was that a good experience for you?

DC: It was an excellent experience. I learned a lot about discipline and out there again how to get along with people, make the connections, and I met a lot of fellow students that I still know today. One lives in Chicago, and one lives in California.

JE: Did that make you want to continue in the military as a result of that experience?

DC: Well, when I first, after I finished Morgan Park and graduated, I went to move to Veneta that summer, and from there I went to Oklahoma University in 1952.

JE: So you graduated from Morgan Park in 51 or 52?

DC: 1952.

JE: 1952, right.

Chapter 03 – 6:56
Jimmy Hoffa

John Erling (JE): Pearl Harbor, December 7th, 1941. You would have been seven at the time. I don't know if what you might remember about rationing and all that at seven. There might be some things you remember.

Denny Cresap (DC): I remember gasoline being rationed. Rationed gasoline stamps, and there was also other items, tires. Certain types of food products were rationed, and my father had access to a lot of tubs, pound tubs of butter with Armour and Company, and he was able to take the butter, and he had a friend that had nylon hose, so they traded nylon holes in butter back in those days.

JE: Do you remember the day of December 7th? December 7th, 1941, how that came about?

DC: Vaguely, I remember the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and I remember the day that the Second World War was over also. We happened to be in Michigan at Indian Lake, and everybody was celebrating, and some of the people were so happy and thrilled, they actually pushed over some outhouses and set them on fire to celebrate.

JE: You would have been about 11 years old.

DC: That's correct.

JE: The Thralls, what are their first names?

DC: Art and Mildred Thrall became friends of my parents when they lived on the south side of Chicago, and Art Thrall, actually, when my mother and I came home from the hospital, he carried her up the stairs, and they carried me up the stairs also to a third-floor apartment.

Art Thrall was a self-made man. He started out in the 1920s working for the Illinois Central Railroad, and later he and his brother-in-law started Thrall Car Company in Chicago Heights, Illinois, repairing railroad cars. During the Second World War, Art was a dollar-a-year man for the government, and his company manufactured a hospital train for the government.

JE: Tell us what that means, a dollar-a-year man.

DC: During the Second World War, there were a lot of businessmen that were advisors to the U.S. government, and that's what they were paid, a dollar a year to be advisors.

JE: So they had to be paid something, and so they were happy. So they just gave their time then, didn't they?

DC: They gave their time and expertise in whatever field they were experts in.

JE: Back to the military academy, some of your classmates, you referred to them as people you know now, but some of them were the sons of some questionable character.

DC: Yes. During my time at military school, one of the young men, Charles O'Brien, came from Detroit. And years later, when my wife and I lived in Oklahoma City, on the 6 o'clock news, they had a report that Chuckie O'Brien had been indicted for trying to bribe the jury in Tennessee for Jimmy Hoffa. And I told my wife that, “well, that's the same fellow I went to

military school," and she couldn't believe it. So I found them.

I got a yearbook, and I pulled it out, and there he was, Charles O'Brien. And he had gone to military school with me for two years, and his mother was the personal secretary to Jimmy Hoffa. And he was like a son with Jimmy Hoffa Jr. And actually, he is the driver that drove Jimmy Hoffa to the luncheon that day when Jimmy Hoffa disappeared. And then after that, why, Chuckie and Jimmy Hoffa, the junior had a big falling out.

JE: And that was like in 1975 when that happened.

DC: Yes.

JE: Right. So then Chuckie became a person of interest then in the disappearance of Hoffa.

DC: Yes. They never were able to figure out what happened to Hoffa. And Chuckie said that he didn't know anything other than he just dropped him off for lunch at that restaurant that day.

JE: He never had lunch with him. He just dropped him off.

DC: He just dropped him off. Yeah. I bet he got a lot of questions.

JE: He got a lot of questioning, didn't he?

DC: A lot of questions.

JE: What was speculation about where Hoffa might have ended up? Anybody? Even in the football field, I think, at the end of the zone.

DC: Anybody's guess.

JE: Right. Any other classmates that were characters that you might think of? Don Sweeney?

DC: Don Sweeney was a classmate also. His real name was Don Swinarski. And his father was a state representative from the West Side Block in Chicago.

The West Side Block was the area on the west side of the stockyards, a very democratic stronghold. And that's also where Mayor Daley started his career as an attorney, was on the west side of Chicago.

And Don Sweeney's father was in the refuge business with his relatives, which was a very lucrative business in Chicago. But in those days, the control of Cook County, with the Democratic Party, everybody had an assignment. And it was so well organized. They had precinct captains. They had block captains that were required to get everybody out to vote when they had elections.

JE: There were those who said that dead people voted in Chicago.

DC: I think they still are to this day. They might be. But to show you how much influence Don Sweeney had, we decided to give our senior class, class president a gift. And we went down to the stockyards on the west side where they manufacture beautiful leather luggage. And we went into the plant and showed his father's business card to the owner. And he said, “oh, you're Swinarski's kid.” He said, “you can pick out any luggage you want, and I'm going to sell it to you 50% under wholesale.”

JE: Yeah.

DC: And then another interesting situation was after our senior prom, which was out on the very far south side of Chicago, we wanted to go to Cicero out on the west side to one of the nightclubs. And we couldn't figure out how we were going to get from the far south side of Chicago way out to Cicero.

And Swinarski said, oh, that's easy. “We'll get a police escort. My father got... We got connections with the state police.” So after our dance at midnight, we all lined up on 111th Street, and we had an escort across the city of Chicago with the state police to go to our after party.

Chapter 04 – 7:00
Moved to Vinita

John Erling (JE): So your family then, as you've alluded to, moved to Veneta because your dad's cattle buying business.

Denny Cresap (DC): Yes. Right. He had retired from Armour. Well, he had actually, in 1948, had moved from Chicago out to the suburbs to Palos Heights, which was halfway between Joliet and downtown Chicago, the Loop. And when he retired, he had a friend at the stockyards named Homer White.

Homer White had a stockyards within the stockyards. And his stockyards fed cattle that were being shipped through Chicago from the east coast to the west coast. And he had a sale barn in Veneta, and he suggested it might... So my dad come down and look at buying cattle in Oklahoma after he retired. So my father spent 1951, two or three months in Veneta buying cattle.

And when school was over in June of 1951, my brother, my mother, and I went to Veneta for a week to see what Veneta looked like. Well, after living in Chicago all my life, Veneta was kind of a big change. And while there, my father kept saying “you got to see Grand Lake, you got to see the dam.”

So we actually went out five miles on 66, 69, and 66, which before the turnpike was built. And we turned right to go to Langley and off of Highway 66, all the way to the dam was a gravel road. So we could hardly wait to get in the car and go back to Chicago.

JE: I can understand.

DC: But they decided to move to Chicago. And in 1951, and that's when I finished my senior year of high school in Chicago.

JE: So when your family then lived in Veneta, you rented a place to stay.

DC: Well, my father rented a place to stay until they moved in 1951, in the fall of 1951 to Veneta. They rented a house in Veneta.

JE: But who did that house belong to?

DC: Well, in the spring of 1951, when my dad went to Veneta, to check everything out, he rented a room from a lady named Carrie Lawrence. And Carrie was a cousin of Will Rogers. And she told my dad the story that she and some of her two girlfriends went to a rodeo one time and they were outside the gate. And Will Rogers came up and roped the three of them and told the gate, take a ticker to let these girls in free.

JE: It's fun to hear all these stories about Will Rogers. Then, uh, you went on to college and you went on to Oklahoma University. Did you have any idea thinking about what you might want to be or do in life?

DC: I had no idea what I was going to do. And I decided I'd study journalism. So I picked journalism and kind of went from there.

JE: Since you had a military background as high school, did you join ROTC?

DC: Yes. At first I thought I might want to be in the Naval ROTC and I got into that. And I was in it for about 30 days and I decided I wasn't going to ever be a good sailor. So I switched over to the ROTC military because I had four years' experience with Army.

JE: And then you pledged to a fraternity, did you?

DC: Yes, I pledged Phi Gamma Delta.

JE: And what did you learn by pledging to Phi Gamma Delta?

DC: I learned a lot. We actually, a lot of my classmates that I pledged with, came from all over Oklahoma. And I was able to be friends and associates of these classmates, even to this day.

JE: You started as a journalism major, but sometime you ended up being a businessman. Did you switch to business?

DC: Well, I was taking business courses also at the same time.

JE: Back then, Oklahoma was still a dry state, right?

DC: Oklahoma was a dry state and everybody at OU in those days, we had a lot of people that were from Oklahoma. They were big beer drinkers and Slitz was the big brand at that time.

JE: So what did they do? Did they have to go across state lines to get beer?

DC: Well, they didn't know 3-2 beer was available, which is 4% alcohol instead of 5%. But for liquor, you either had to go across the state line in Missouri, Arkansas, or Kansas or Texas to get liquor. Otherwise, you had to buy it locally from bootleggers.

JE: And I suppose if you or your friends went out across state line, you were bootleggers yourself.

DC: Technically, I guess you'd say that. A friend, one of my classmates and I decided we'd go to Wichita Falls and get some liquor for the Phi Gamma Fiji Island party. So we took orders from all of our classmates and the two of us drove down to Wichita Falls and bought five cases of wine. We waited until it got almost closing time when we went into the liquor store and bought the five mixed cases of liquor.

And then we turned around and drove back to Norman. We made enough money off four cases where we ended up with a case of mixed liquor of our own for additional parties down the road.

JE: I didn't know you'd be doing that for life.

DC: No, I'm glad we didn't get caught or I might not have qualified later. I'm glad we didn't get caught or I might not have qualified later in life to have a federal basic permit.

JE: So you had several probably summer jobs that you worked while going to OU?

DC: Yes. For two summers, I helped my father buy cattle. We would leave Veneta Sunday evening and go to McAllister. And on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, we would buy cattle at the stockyards there. And the cattle were shipped either to Texas or Kansas City. And we bought for Cudahy, Armour, Swift in those days and shipped the cattle.

On Wednesday evening, we'd go to Holdenville. We bought cattle at the Holdenville sale. Friday, we were in Hominy and Saturday in Pawhuska. And then we got home Saturday night. So I learned quite a bit about the cattle business in those days.

JE: Did you graduate from OU?

DC: No, sir. Between my junior and senior year, I was kind of worn out and everything. I was getting tired. I was tired of school and I decided I'd join the Army. Before I got drafted, we had the draft back in those days and my number was coming up. So I thought I'd just go ahead and serve in the military for a couple years.

JE: Okay, so that would have been in what year?

DC: 1955.

Chapter 05 – 7:25
Army

John Erling (JE): The Korean War was on then, right?

Denny Cresap (DC): It was, the Korean War was just about, I think it was over with as far as the actual fighting.

JE: But we still had a draft, and the draft was on because of the Korean War.

DC: The draft was on, and everybody had to sign up at 18 years of age. If you got drafted, you had to serve a minimum of 18 months.

JE: All right. Then what, how many years were you in service?

DC: Actually, I ended up three years at the time I enlisted instead of being drafted because I had the idea that I would go ahead and go to officer's training school because I had all that four years of background in high school.

JE: You became an officer then, right?

DC: No, I never became an officer. I did my basic training at Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, and actually it was a real rough winter, and they didn't have anybody working in the orderly room, so I actually got to spend basic training in the orderly room.

I didn't even have to go to the field because I'd had the military school experience. And after that, why, then I got transferred from Fort Chaffee to Germany, and I was supposed to go to a field artillery outfit up in the mountains overlooking the border.

I was supposed to go to a field artillery outfit up in East Germany, but there again, we flew from Fort Dix, New Jersey to Frankfurt, and that was another factor where it was a big change in my life when I got to Germany.

JE: And tell us about that.

DC: Well, when you get to Germany at Rhine-Main, you spend the night in Frankfurt, and then the next day you go to classification and assignment, and we're sitting in this room, and the warrants are in the room, and the warrants are in the room, and the warrant officer asked if anybody could type. And of course, usually they say you shouldn't volunteer because you don't know what's going to happen.

So I raised my hand, and the warrant officer sent me upstairs to the orderly room, and they didn't have a company clerk at that time. And the captain said, “can you type?” And I said, “yes, I can type.” I really wasn't very good, but they changed my orders. Instead of getting on a train, and being sent up to the mountains, I got to stay right there in Frankfurt. And I was typing

up court-martials in the morning, and these were what they called summary court-martials, that when the troops came in, they were supposed to come in at 9 o'clock in the evening, and they were told if they didn't come back to the building at 9 o'clock, they'd be locked out, and then they would have a summary court-martial and be fine.

The next morning, so that's where I started out, in the orderly room, and then within a few months, why I got promoted, where I was giving the orientation to the troops that came in from the States. This replacement company, the 261st Replacement Company, was also handling all the troops, single soldiers, that were going back to the States. All personnel that were flying to and from Fort Dix, by air, and of course everybody wanted to get their orders from Heidelberg to Bly. They didn't want to go to Bremerhaven and go home by ship. One time, prior to Christmas, the president said that he was going to have a lot of extra troops from Germany home for Christmas.

Well, these single soldiers all started coming in to our replacement company, and we had these billets that were more like apartment billets, and normally we would only handle maybe 100 to 150 at a time to fly back to Fort Dix. But this time, we were up to over 300 single men wanting to be home in time for Christmas, because that's what they were promised. Well, it turned out that MATS, the Military Air Transport Service, didn't have enough planes and pilots to get these soldiers home for Christmas.

So one of the men called his congressman in the States and told him what was going on. And within four hours, there were two generals down interviewing all the single men. And all of a sudden, they found enough airplanes to fly everybody home for Christmas.

JE: So you were honorably discharged when then?

DC: I might tell you one other story.

JE: Yep.

DC: In this unit, there was called an alien European enlistment. This is where... Another soldier and I were asked to help at the alien European enlistment

section there in Frankfurt. And there were two things that they did. If you were an American citizen and also had a dual citizenship of a European country, when you became 18, you had to decide which way you were going to go.

And if you decide to be the U.S. citizen, you had to come to the States. And serve your 18 months in the Army. The other thing that this particular unit did was during the Hungarian Revolution, they had all these men that left Budapest and they were in Italy. And the U.S. Army brought the men from Italy to Frankfurt.

Basically, it was illegal at the time because they hadn't been sworn into the Army yet. But when they got to Frankfurt, they were sworn into the Army. And then everything was legal. And we had a large consolidated mess hall that one of my roommates managed. And it ran 24-7. And they would take these European enlistees, refugees, I guess you'd call them, to the mess hall. They'd march them over there three times a day to feed them. And they had never seen so much food in their lifetime. And they would just pile food on those trays.

But what the program was, we were working on what we call 201 files and putting together all the information and have the packet ready when they went back to South Carolina. And once in a while, these people, there'd be a flagging action and the person was gone. So we think that the Russians were actually sending some people through the system to see what was going on. But they had... They had personal histories.

And I remember this one gentleman had been in Siberia for three years before he escaped. What they did when they got to South Carolina, they taught them English. And then they were... If they stayed in the U.S. Army for six years, they'd get their U.S. citizenship. But they would bring these people back to Europe and put them up in the mountains in the radio shacks and listen to what was going on behind the arm.

JE: That's a great story.

Chapter 06 – 8:46
Life After Army

John Erling (JE): So then you came out of the Army in January 1959.

Denny Cresap (DC): Yes, I got discharged in January '59.

JE: Then what?

DC: Well, I had no idea what I was going to do, so I contacted family friends, the Thralls, who I'd worked for for a couple of summers at their railroad manufacturing plant. They gave me a job, which I thought was going to be in Chicago, but they had owned a company in Indiana, an oil equipment company, and they transferred me over to the oil equipment company in Indianapolis.

JE: And how did that work out?

DC: Well, it was a job, but it really wasn't very exciting. I was working in an office selling oil equipment to service stations, jacks, lifts, lube equipment, everything, and it just, like I said, wasn't very exciting. And then in the spring, 1959, there was a vote in Oklahoma, and the people voted to go wet.

JE: What does that mean, go wet?

DC: Well, they decided they would legalize liquor. I had remembered that when I lived in Palos Heights when I was in grade school, a couple that lived behind us, Sandy and Ann Dawson, he had worked for Four Roses Distillery. So I was able to trace Sandy and Ann down, and he was state manager of National Distillers for the state of Arkansas, and I called him, and he remembered me, and I asked him if there was going to be an opening with National Distillers in Oklahoma, and he said yes, and a man by the name of Jack Hansen lived in Iola, Kansas, was going to be promoted to the state manager, and he would try to set me up with an interview.

JE: So that would mean then you'd become a sales rep.

DC: Yes, a salesman. I was able to set up an interview with Mr. Hansen, so I went back to Veneta. My mother and dad helped me buy a used car. I might mention when I got out of the Army, I only had $500, and I didn't have a car in Indianapolis.

So driving up to Iola for the interview, and I was running a little bit late, and I called Mr. Hansen and told him I was going to be late, and later I realized that that helped me with the interview, to call him and tell him I was going to be late.

JE: Yep.

DC: I interviewed with Jack. I got to Iola and I went to Jack's house and I met his wife and two daughters and he interviewed me and he told me he'd get back with me. He called me in a few days and told me he was going to hire me to be his assistant for Eastern Oklahoma and he was also going to hire another person for Oklahoma – western Oklahoma.

So I started out with a salary was $500 a month, a company car, and three cases of liquor for samples.

JE: What kind of liquor?

DC: Well, it was every kind that we sold. We sold all the major brands, bourbon at that time, Old Granddad, Old Taylor, Old Crow. We had Gilby's Gin, and we had French wines and the Kuyper's Cordials. The first few months we actually – I was able to go up to Kansas and tour all the wholesale liquor companies up there.

We also went to Joplin, there were five wholesale liquor companies in Joplin at that time and later, after Oklahoma went wet, there was only one left so that kind of gives you an idea of how much liquor was coming out. One of the bootleggers in Veneta, Alfred Woodard, actually was getting his liquor out of Cairo, Illinois and he could drive the backroads from Cairo to Veneta.

But what we had was an Nashville distillers filled up different liquor bottles with iced tea and Jack and I I toured Oklahoma and went to towns like Muskogee and we'd set up in a hotel with kind of a dummy liquor store and we'd invited people we'd thought were going to be in the liquor business and we'd showed them the liquor store and tried to give them information about where to locate products in the store.

JE: So this was all before the laws had actually been...

DC: Right, this is... Well, the law had been passed, but the legislature was writing the law. So we spent three months in 1959 in Oklahoma City, watching the legislature write the laws, and Senator Shoemaker from Muskogee was head of the Senate committee, and there was a problem with everybody in the state was telling their local representative what should be in the law or not in the law, and a lot of the ministers at that time were telling their legislators, you know, what would be in there.

Of course, they were trying to make it harder for the law, to really work, and there was a man by the name of Ross McClendon that came out of state, and he had SANE, Sooner Alcoholic Narcotics Education, and Ross McClendon just, he'd go on and on and on how terrible and sinful liquor was.

Well, one time, he and his wife were in St. Louis at a convention, and he was caught down on the Mississippi River in a lot of these bars, and... His excuse was he was doing research. It made the Daily Oklahoman. Of course, after we went wet, he ended up leaving Oklahoma and going, moving someplace else.

But it was really interesting to watch the process of how the laws were written. 1949 is when Kansas went wet, so they decided they'd take the Kansas law 10 years later, and... patterned the Oklahoma law after Kansas. But there were things in the Kansas law that weren't in the Oklahoma law that caused problems even to this day.

JE: Can you cite any of that? Problems?

DC: One of the things that happened was that prior to the election, when they were writing the bill for the people to vote on, Howard Edmondson, was governor at that time, and Joe Cannon was his enforcement officer, safety officer. And Joe Cannon actually shut down all the bootleggers in 1959 at the beginning, before there was a vote, and none of the bootleggers had any liquor.

It was completely shut off, and that's one reason why the people voted wet in April of '59, was because of Joe Cannon. Well, as I understand it, Joe Cannon was the one who voted wet.

JE: I understand that Edmondson, Governor Edmondson, he actually wanted it to go wet, I believe.

DC: Yes, yes.

JE: And so he decided, well, I'm going to enforce these rules now.

DC: He told Joe Cannon was his enforcement officer to shut it down. Kind of interesting, Edmondson and Joe Cannon were from Muskogee, and they were also five yams.

JE: Okay.

DC: Joe Cannon was the pledge trainer, I guess, when they were in college together, and I guess he was a pretty tough pledge trainer. And when they were writing the law, because Denny Garrison, Senator from Bartlesville, said, if I had known that Edmondson and Cannon were going to run the state, he said, I probably wouldn't have got into politics.

But Denny Garrison, he was a Republican, of course, from Bartlesville, but he was very well liked by the Democrats, which controlled everything in those days.

JE: And I've interviewed Denny Garrison, and so we'll be able to listen to his story. We'll be able to listen to his story here on VoicesofOklahoma.com. And so, yeah, and so the people were so uncomfortable with living the way

you should live in Prohibition that it forced them to say, hey, we need to vote for making this state wet.

DC: Yes, at the time it went wet, I think there were just two states in the country, Oklahoma and Mississippi, that were dry.

Chapter 07 – 7:48
Ford Dealership

Denny Cresap (DC): Well, it came to a point in 1962, and two national distillers wanted to move me to New York City, to the home office, 99 Park Avenue. And I wanted to stay in Oklahoma because I thought eventually at Oklahoma, they'd have a franchise for liquor just like beer. And I wanted to be a wholesaler.

So rather than moving to New York, why, my father-in-law was a Ford dealer in Veneta and had been since the Second World War. So just before I went in the Army for two or three months, I was waiting to go in. While I lived in Veneta, I was actually a car salesman for about a few months waiting to go into service.

And so we decided that I'd buy a Ford dealership. And we looked around at one in South Texas and then a couple in Oklahoma. We looked at Nowater and Cushing and ended up buying the Ford dealership in Pawhuska. And we left Oklahoma City in 1964. And moved to Pawhuska to be in the Ford dealership.

John Erling (JE): All right. And then let's mention your wife's name is?

DC: Gail.

JE: Gail. So when you say your father-in-law, then that's...

DC: That's Carl Campbell. And I married Gail in 1960. I was driving a Chevrolet company car. And I figured that he might be a little upset, you know. My daughter married... Married a guy driving a Chevrolet. I asked for her hand

and we got married on November 26th, 1960. What was kind of interesting, I was back in Veneta early in 1960.

And my brother and his girlfriend, Susie Raleigh, they fixed me up with a blind date with Gail. I was 25 and Gail was 19. And Gail's mother didn't really want her to go out. She didn't want her to go out with me because I had just come back from Germany. And this was a blind date on April Fool's Day. And Susie told Gail's mother she'd keep a close eye on us. And so our first date, as I said, was on April Fool's Day.

And we went out to Langley and had a steak dinner at one of the nightclubs that was really running back in those days. Langley and Spavano's, where everybody went on weekends from Tulsa and Oklahoma. Oklahoma City to party at Grand Lake. So from April Fool's Day to November, it was a short six-month romance.

JE: Then married.

DC: Got married.

JE: How many children did you have?

DC: We had one son, John, and he was born in 1964 at the Baptist Hospital in Oklahoma City.

JE: Let's talk about Denny Cresap Ford. We got to Pawhuska.

DC: I bought the dealership from Barney Oldfield.

JE: Let me ask you, where did you get the money? Where did you buy that? And how much did it cost?

DC: The dealership was pretty run down. And it was out on the west side of town. The previous owner, Barney Oldfield, had shut down the dealership downtown and moved out to a little building on the west side of Pawhuska on Highway 60. And he was a rancher from Burbank. And he was better at ranching than he was at selling cars.

And I believe we borrowed $40,000 from Gail's Aunt Helen, who lived in San Antonio, to go in the Ford business. And Ford required that a new facility be built. I didn't have the money to build it, but I was able to find a gentleman by the name of Virgil Standifer that had nursing homes. And he actually built the building for me. And I leased it back from him.

JE: So as a car dealer then in Pawhuska, many interesting ranchers would buy trucks from you, I suppose.

DC: Yes, there were four families at that time that owned over half a million acres of land.

JE: What were the names of those families?

DC: Chapman Barnard. I had business from the Barnards, Chapman Barnard. And the Drummonds, there were a large number of the Drummonds that had ranches.

JE: Frederick Drummond?

DC: Frederick Drummond, Fred A. Drummond. Actually, I had all their truck business. On Doors, and then there was Boots Adams. Of course, Boots Adams was the retired chairman of Phillips, and he had owned part of the Chevrolet dealership in Bartlesville, which, by the way, furnished all the company cars at Phillips.

JE: What was he doing buying Fords from you?

DC: He didn't buy any. No, Boots Adams had Chevrolets because he owned the Chevrolet dealership.

JE: You were just pointing out that he was there and didn't buy from you.

DC: Right. There were other, some large ranchers, not as large as those four families, but Boots Adams put together 100,000 acres up in Four Acre, Oklahoma.

JE: Were you around him at all, Boots Adams?

DC: Yes.

JE: What kind of a guy was he?

DC: Well, I only had one instance where actually he had his wife, Dorothy Lynn, like keg beer, and she would come down to our warehouse in Bartlesville, later on when I was in the beer business, Boots Adams' wife liked draft beer. She liked Michelob, and we had them in quarter barrels, and they had a keg dispenser out at their house, and she would buy the quarter barrels of beer.

I would go out there every so often and flush her beer lines. Draft beer was required at least every two or three weeks you flush the lines out and clean. Well, I was out there one time. She had called. There was a problem with this little refrigerated one-keg box. It was foaming, the beer, and I went out there and cleaned the lines, and it was just like a regular refrigerator, and it has a compressor, and it was low on freon. Well, I was in the family room with her, and Boots was in the bedroom on the phone talking to somebody, and he stopped and he yelled at his wife and said, “Just tell that guy to give us another. Another new refrigerator.”

Well, you know, they cost $700 or $800, and back in those days, I couldn't afford to give him a keg box, and he owned the Coca-Cola distributorship, and it was just a little freon problem, and they have Coke machines all over the place, and so I just told his wife to just call down at the Coke plant and have them come out and put some freon in the compressor, and that'll solve the problem.

It was kind of interesting. The Coke plant used to be downtown Bartlesville across the street from the Adams building, and Phillips decided they wanted to build a new executive office building on that corner, and so Boots went across the street, bought the Coke plant, moved it out on Washington Boulevard, and sold the land to Phillips to build a new executive office building, and up until that time, there weren't any soft drink machines in the Phillips office, but after Boots bought the Coke plant, why, they put Coke machines in all the office buildings. \

JE: All right, we should point out, he was the chairman and CEO of Phillips Petroleum Company. Correct.

DC: Yes.

Chapter 08 – 12:26
Mullendore Murder

John Erling (JE): Okay, let me ask you, you said Mullendore. Right. And we have the story, the death of E.C. Mullendore III. We've talked about that on our website. So did E.C. Mullendore come into your Ford store?

Denny Cresap (DC): Well, yes, E.C. I knew E.C. and his wife, Linda, and one time E.C. stopped by and asked me to ride out west of town to Bluestem Lake. The Mullendores and the Drummonds had land on the north side of Bluestem Lake, where the city of Pawhuska got their water, and he was building a new set of pens out there and new fences, and I rode out there with him, and he showed me what he was doing. E.C. was spending an awful lot of money in those days, fencing and corrals and everything, and he was starting to have some financial problems, and he was trying to borrow money.

In those days, he was able to refinance a lot of his spending just because of the value of land going up. It got to the point where he couldn't borrow as much money as he wanted to borrow.

JE: Did he mortgage his cattle, too, didn't he?

DC: Yes.

JE: So that all came crashing down, of course. Did you like him? Was he a personable sort of guy?

DC: He was a little bit overbearing, I'd say. I think he was pretty heavy overweight. He was real slender one time, and he got into a fight with

some hunters one time, and he got beat up pretty bad. He gained a lot of weight.

JE: Do you remember the day he was murdered?

DC: Yes. Actually, Bruce Gamble was my attorney in Pawhuska, and he was a very good hunter. He had been a labor attorney for Sinclair in Tulsa, and he left Sinclair, and he was a Republican living in Osage County. And I had registered as a Democrat when I went to Osage County because I knew that I wouldn't get to sell any trucks to the county commissioners unless I was a Democrat, because in those days, the Democrats ran the whole state of Oklahoma.

The night that, well, Henry Bellman was governor at that time, and he appointed Bruce Gamble a Republican assistant district attorney at that time. And the night of the murder, George Wayman, the sheriff called Bruce, and he and Wayman went up to the ranch, and Bruce said that E.C. was lying on the floor there by the sliding glass door at the guest house where he and Linda lived by the swimming pool. And he was dead at that time, and they picked him up and put him in an ambulance.

They took him to the Jane Phillips Hospital in Bartlesville, and the sheriff told them, don't do anything until I get there. Well, later, when the sheriff got there, Arnold Moore, the funeral director, had already taken him.

JE: And we have interviewed Sheriff Wayman on our website as well, and he tells that story. There was no reason to take him to the hospital because he was dead already, so why wouldn't he leave? So they disturbed the scene. And then, of course, we know that Chubb Anderson was the prime suspect in that.

DC: And there's a new book that just came out, The Last 30 Days.

JE: And this crime, of course, has never been officially solved.

DC: What was kind of interesting, Dale Kurt was the foreman of the ranch at that time. And I don't know if Wayman told you this or not, but we knew Dale Kurt, and we were at Kenny Fox's restaurant after the murder. And we

were talking to Dale, and he said that when it happened, he ran over there from his house, and then he jumped in his pickup, and he drove from the headquarters out to the entrance, the big crossbell entrance.

And it was one of those nights where if a car or truck goes down the road, the dust would hang in the air. And he said there wasn't any dust on that road that night. I don't know if Wayman said anything about that or not.

JE: Yeah, he alluded to that, right.

DC: There was another thing that was kind of interesting. I think it was the day of the funeral, the day before the funeral, the Budweiser rep from Tulsa was calling on me, in Bartlesville, and we went out to the Holiday Inn to have lunch, and he had the A&E on the back window of his car, and we got out of the car, and this fellow gentleman walked up to us, and he said, “are you all connected with Budweiser?” And Mel Anderson said, “yes, I'm the rep out of Tulsa.”

So we had lunch with him. He said, well, I live in California, but I own... Seven pizza huts in San Antonio, and I'm here for the funeral. Well, it turned out that he and E.C. were partners in these seven pizza huts down in San Antonio, and he said “the only time that I ever hear from E.C. is when he wants to get some money out of our Pizza Huts.”

JE: Wow. And here's a man whose father had lots of acreage, lots of money, and he came down to that level. Trying to get money out of a pizza hut, because he was spending wildly his money at the time.

DC: Gail's Aunt Helen, when she graduated from high school, went to work in the First National Bank in Veneta as a teller, and Ewing Hossel, the rancher, offices were on the second floor. Well, he hired Helen in, like, 1938 to go to work for him in his office. And in 1941... He bought the Freest Ranch at Eagle's Pass on the Rio Grande, and Mr. Hossel and his wife and sister-in-law moved to the St. Anthony Hotel, and they had a suite of rooms there in 1944, and they wanted to take Helen along.

She was single, and Gail's grandparents were hesitant about a little girl from Veneta going to San Antonio, and Mr. Hossel said, “Oh, no, she's going

to live with us in these suite of rooms." So they moved to San Antonio and lived in the St. Anthony, and she outlived Mr. and Mrs. Hossel and Mrs. Ryder, and then she moved into the condo by Trinity University.

But she was real close to the Mullendores, the Drummonds, all the big ranchers in Texas at the King Ranch and all that. So one Sunday morning, while she was... She was living in the St. Anthony Hotel. At this time, she was living there by herself. This Christmas morning, she got a call from E.C. and Linda from the ranch, and they wished her Merry Christmas and told Helen that they had given their new little baby daughter, one very old, a diamond drop for Christmas. She was only two or three years old, and E.C. said, "I'd sure like to have lunch with you sometime."

And Helen said, "Oh, that'll be fine. Just any time you come down, let me know." And so they hung up, and later that day, she got a knock on her door in San Antonio, and it was E.C. He flew down there the same day and wanted to borrow money from her, and, of course, she said that, you know, she didn't have that kind of money. She didn't need a loan of money, and he stayed there in St. Anthony. And the next morning, she saw him having breakfast with a big politician, a construction company man trying to borrow money from him.

JE: So this was all toward the last days before his murder.

DC: Another thing that happened before he was murdered, why Aunt Helen would come up to the Big Creek Ranch in Nolah County, which... It originally belonged to Mr. Hossel, and he passed away. He gave all of his employees that worked for him land that he had acquired during his lifetime, and he gave Aunt Helen the headquarters in 5,000 acres up at Big Creek.

So Aunt Helen had the Drummonds, Fred Drummond, his wife, and E.C. and Linda over to the ranch for dinner one evening, and Gail and I were there, and Fred Drummond, and E.C. and I went out in the pastures to look at some cattle, and E.C. was talking about the haves and have-nots, and he said, "One of these days, there's going to be a hell of a mess because of the haves and the have-nots."

JE: Okay, what do you think he meant by that?

DC: Well, there's problems we're having today with the economy and everything and the people, the middle class that aren't getting ahead like they should because of the way things are being run.

JE: Interesting. That phrase stood out in your mind all these years later.

DC: What was really interesting, while we were driving around in the pasture, Gail, Aunt Helen, Linda Mullendore, and Ruth Drummond stayed back at the headquarters, and they were visiting, and Linda just kept going on and on about how wonderful Chubb Anderson was and how he helped take care of their kids, and he took the kids from the... from the ranch to Bartlesville to school, and he picked them up after school, and how he even changed the diapers on the little girl and everything. So she spoke very highly of Chubb at that time.

JE: Do you think there was a romantic relationship between the two?

DC: Well, looking between the lines, there probably could have been a little something going on. I don't know if Sheriff Wayman told you or not, when the day he was murdered, E.C. was... He'd been drinking a lot. He'd been drinking a lot in the day, and he and Chubb went to the races, stock car races in Coffeyville, and then they came home that night.

JE: And they got into a fight.

DC: Yeah, they got into a fight, and it could have been, you know, about Linda and his relationship with Linda, possibly.

JE: Right, and that, of course, is speculation, but there were more than you and I. I wasn't there, but you're even admitting there could have been a romantic relationship because Chubb Anderson was physically quite an attractive person, I understand.

DC: That is my understanding. You never saw him in person?

JE: No, but I know Gail and I thought after, you know, the way Linda kept bragging on how he helped her take care of the kids and everything, we thought that maybe there was something going on.

JE: So you thought that at that time?

DC: Yeah, we thought when he got murdered that there was something going on. Could have been. Did the sheriff tell you about a man named Green that was in the book from Kansas City?

JE: Yes.

DC: Was there at the ranch?

JE: He was there, but it turned out he didn't become a high prime suspect.

DC: No, but he was with the mafia, and at least he was wanting to borrow money from the mafia. I shouldn't say it that way. He was wanting to borrow money from people in Kansas City.

JE: There was a mafia connection. That's interesting that you were hanging out with these three guys, these guys, and that all came about because your Aunt Helen, through marriage, put that together. And it was through Gail, actually, that you were there.

DC: Yeah, that's right.

JE: Right.

DC: And that's how we met the Hossels. And Aunt Helen actually loaned us the money to go into the Ford business. And we think that Mr. Hossel helped her loan us the money to go into the Ford business.

Chapter 09 – 10:34
$3,000 Used Truck

John Erling (JE): Eventually, the car business was not interesting to you.

Denny Cresap (DC): It was interesting. The car business was interesting, but with four families on over half a million acres of land, and there was a Ford dealer in Skiatook, Hominy, Fairfax, Bill Dunges in Bartlesville, Jack Bowker in Ponca City. There were too many Ford dealers and not enough people, and like any business, you've got to have volume to make money, and new cars didn't sell very well, and pickups were starting to sell like they are today, but one thing that did sell at that time was the Mustang, but I couldn't get enough Mustangs. I could sell Mustangs all the time, but they were allocated because they were so popular.

JE: So this was like '64 or '65?

DC: '64 or '65. So the factory rep would come around once a month, and we'd work up the orders, and he'd say, well, I can get you a Mustang or two, but you need to buy a Falcon or a Fairlane. So I'd say, “okay, I need the Mustangs.” Well, my floor plan was $100,000. All of a sudden, I had a lot of new Falcons and Fairlanes sitting out on the lot that I couldn't sell.

They just weren't turning. I'd gone over to Ponca City to pick up a car from Jack Bowker, and Gail called and said that CIT, which was their checking my floor plan, I had all these cars that weren't selling, plus there was a couple they couldn't find. Well, those were company cars, so Gail was real upset. She was working in the office at that time, and I got back over there, and I explained where the cars were and everything, so everything was fine, but she was scared to death, thought we were out of trust.

So I knew that I had to do something else, that we would never make enough money living in Pawhuska, although it was a very interesting town. The two banks in town were ranching banks, and they didn't like to loan money on cars, and there were two small finance companies. One was out of Kansas City, and they did the consumer loans and everything, and they did very well in Pawhuska.

My next-door neighbor, Eddie King, was the Cadillac dealer, and the wives of all the ranchers, drove Cadillacs, but it was the smallest Cadillac dealership in the United States. There was only 5,000 people in Pawhuska.

JE: And how many could afford a Cadillac?

DC: The ranchers.

JE: Right.

DC: There wasn't any middle-class or lunch-bucket trade in Pawhuska in those days. In the oil business, the water flooding had gone downhill. I asked, I went to, one time I asked the principal of the high school, what were their plans, down the road, for more students and more teachers, and he said, I haven't got any plans. We're not growing.

JE: Okay, so you gave up the car dealership.

DC: Well, Gail and I were trying to figure out what are we going to do, so I knew, for two or three years, I decided we better have an exit plan, get out of the car business. Well, one day, Cab Rennick, who was an all-American basketball player, and he had a liquor store in Bartlesville, and we became very good friends.

And Cab started a new venture called Hometown Stamps, and he came over to Pawhuska and asked me if I would give away Hometown Stamps when I sold a new or used vehicle. And they were like S&H green stamps, where you'd paste them in the books for gifts.

And I said, yes, I would do it. And he mentioned that the Budweiser distributorship was for sale in Bartlesville, which which was in Pawhuska territory. I didn't think a whole lot about it at the time, the first time he said it, because I'd been in the liquor business with National, and a case of liquor might cost $75, $85, where a case of beer was under $5. So I didn't... It wasn't the romance to me at beer like there was in liquor, say, wines and champagne.

But one day, Frederick Drummond brought his pickup in to get it serviced, and I was telling him that the Budweiser distributorship was for sale over in Bartlesville. And he said, “well, I've got a fraternity brother from OSU, David McMahon, in Fort Smith.” He's a cattle rancher and also a Budweiser distributor. So we called over to Fort Smith and talked to David, and he said, “oh, that's a good business if you've got enough volume.”

Well, back in those days, everybody wanted to be a Coors wholesaler, and this is in '68, and Coors was just going like gangbusters, and they had 50% share of market in the state. And I thought, well, they can't grow much more, because when I worked for National Distillers, we had 50% of the gin business during the bootleg days, because Gilby's Gin was in square bottles, and they could tape three bottles together real easy, and they called them a lug in those days, and people would buy lugs of liquor three at a time and get a discount.

So thinking that Coors couldn't do much more of gaining share of market, why, Frederick and I went to Tulsa and talked to Jack and Dick Bryan, who were the Budweiser wholesalers in Tulsa. They were third-generation wholesalers, and so we decided that we'd try to buy the Budweiser, the Bud distributorship, over in Bartlesville, and it was a one-man, one-truck operation, and Tuck Hayes owned it, and he had been the driver, and the owner had died, and he ended up with the business, and he'd come over to Pawhuska every Wednesday and talk to them about buying them out. Eventually, April of '68, we finally made a deal with them, and we bought it for $20,000.

JE: Did that seem like a lot of money to you or not much money?

DC: Well, it was a lot, and then we borrowed $20,000 from the Union Bank, and Frederick put in $3,000 cash, and I had a used Ford truck that was worth $3,000, so my investment was the $3,000 used truck.

JE: That's funny. I don't care who you are.

DC: So every wholesaler in the state was struggling except Coors, and it wasn't until 1975 that Coors peaked out with 70% share of market with just the Coors Banquet brand. Coors Light wasn't even, didn't exist back in those

days. We'd go to the brewery meetings, and they'd say, well, you just got to, you know, run your business like you should run it, and when we bought the distributorship, I think we took over in the end of April, 1st, probably. Part of May, why, there was no beer in the warehouse.

The brewery was on strike. Well, we had just gone through a Ford strike for three months, didn't have any cars to sell, and Gail said, now why are we going into this business when we've got the problem with the unions?

It was 30 days before we first got our truckload of beer in June, and we were able to kind of allocate it around and took the retailers in Bartlesville and Pawhuska. But what was interesting, back in, in '68, the Teamsters had the contracts, and there was a separate contract for each Budweiser brewery, and the contracts would expire in February, but the union would keep working until closer to summertime, and they were able to go on strike then in April, March, and they were able to go on strike then in April, March, end of March, 1st of April, which made it harder for Anheuser-Busch.

And if they would settle at one brewery in those days, they would cross picket, and for instance, if they settled at St. Louis, then they would send some Teamsters up from Houston to picket, and they did this all over the country. So eventually, Anheuser-Busch was able to get into a three-year contract, and they couldn't cross picket from brewery to brewery. And the last strike was in 1975, and at that time, Gussie Busch's son, August III, said that they couldn't afford to let their wholesalers run out of beer like the past, so he kept the breweries open, and he took the employees, and other than the brewmasters, to do the work.

And Lou Morrow, the factory rep in Tulsa, who's now the wholesaler in Muskogee-McAllister, Lou was sent to Jacksonville, and he worked cleaning out the beechwood chips from the aging tanks.

He got paid his normal salesman's salary, plus a brewery worker's salary, so during this strike, all the employees were out, and they were making a lot of extra money, and by this time, we had one semi, and our semi driver would go from Bartlesville up to St. Louis to get a truckload of beer, and he got up there during the strike, and the only thing they were producing was

12-ounce cans, and they had women secretaries down on the loading dock, and these women were driving the forklifts, and they were loading the trucks faster than the teamsters would load, and Gussie Bush was down on the dock thanking people for coming in during the strike and picking up the beer and everything. But that was the last time they had a strike.

Chapter 10 – 21:30
Bud on Grand Lake

John Erling (JE): What did you – you had Coors, you said 70% of the market. What did you think you needed to do to introduce Budweiser?

Denny Cresap (DC): Well, what happened after, in 1970, the other distributorship that had all the other brands other than the Budweiser brands and the Coors brands, it was Miller, Pabst, Slitz, Lone Star. It was another wholesaler that had those men by the name of Frank Drum from Fort Smith. And he also had the Tulsa distributorship. And we were able to negotiate a deal to buy his distributorship in 1970.

And that took us up to the point where we had enough business to survive. The first. The first year I got in business, we sold 20,000 cases. And our margins were about 60, 70, 70 to 70 cents a case. So by picking up these additional brands and a warehouse in Bartlesville behind the old ice plant, why we were much more efficient and we got our volume up to about 75,000 cases a year, which enabled us. We were able to survive the onslaught of the Coors brand.

What's kind of interesting, the end of the Coors territory was Kansas and Oklahoma. And there was a lot of bootlegging going on. And the bootleggers from Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi were coming to Oklahoma and buying the Coors beer, paying cash for it. And the Coors wholesalers were selling it.

They were selling it for wholesale plus $2 or $3 a case cash. And this beer, we figured 15% of the Coors beer that was reported sold in Oklahoma was

actually going to those other states. And the Coors brewery got wind of it and they went around and told these wholesalers that they would cancel them out if they caught them shipping beer out of their warehouses to these other states.

So after that happened, the bootleggers would have to come to retail stores to get their beer. And one of the biggest outlets was West Siloam Springs, Arkansas, or Oklahoma. The trucks would come into West Siloam Springs in Oklahoma and pull up in the front door. And the Coors truck was in the back door and the beer would go through the store, through the retail store, and then it would go on into the store.

And it was in those other states. And, of course, the Coors couldn't do anything about that. And what happened, beer didn't get rotated in these other states. And so the taste kind of got bad. So when Coors expanded into these other states, their sales weren't as strong as they thought they would be because they didn't have the image, the mystique. They went into states like, Missouri, in Columbia, Missouri, they had Dan Devine, the ex-football coach, as the wholesaler. And in Missouri, Nebraska, South Texas, they had their wholesalers build the warehouses and trucks for 10% of the business within two or three years.

And they never got to 5%. So a lot of those wholesalers, Coors wholesalers, went down. They broke and they had to sell out the other wholesalers. And that happened to Bob Lilly, the football player, Dallas football player that had Waco. He sold out.

JE: But isn't it true, to introduce Coors, you got the college students buying Bud. That's one of the ways you were going to compete with Coors.

DC: Well, what happened, the Coors in 68 was being sold in an 11-ounce can. And it was less expensive. The wholesale price of Bud and Miller and Slits were in 12-ounce cans at $4.85 a case wholesale. And Coors was $4.45 wholesale. And it was priced cheaper in the stores. And the consumer thought it had this premium image. And they thought it was a better buy, but they didn't realize 24 11-ounce cans, they got short two cans on every case they bought.

And then Coors came out with this new filtering system and everything where they wanted the beer to be cold all the time. And they were trying to keep everybody have it cold in their stores. Of course, at first, you couldn't keep it cold when it was in the early 70s. They'd bring Coors into the liquor stores, and it was sweating because it came out of controlled temperature.

So Coors went to a 12-ounce can in the 70s, and they raised the price, the $4 wholesale price, to $4.60 a case. And Bud, Miller, and Slits were, like I said, $4.85 a case. Well, the vice president of Budweiser in Houston was in St. Louis, and he got Gussie Bush to lower the price, wholesale price, $0.25 a case, down to $4.60. So it went to $4.60, and that, along with Slits and Miller, they followed. So all four brands were at wholesale price the same, and they ended up the same in the grocery stores and convenience stores.

Well, then the Longneck Bud, or Longneck Beer, let me put it that way, Budweiser, Slits and Miller were in longnecks, and they were returnable bottles. Coors was in a shortneck bottle, and so it had a different image. And the college students started liking longneck bottles because of the country and western songs and everything. And in the bars in Norman and Stillwater, they were drinking longnecks, and Coors had come out with a longneck also.

And when the students were leaving, they were throwing these longneck returnable bottles into the trash cans. And the brewery saw that, and they said, my gosh, you know, there's $0.84 a case deposit on longneck bottles, and they cost $2.50 a case. So they had a dilemma, and especially Budweiser, because as the returnable bottles got filled on the bottling line, over a period of time, on the top shoulder of the bottle, they'd get real chalky, and they'd have to be thrown away and replaced.

Well, Miller and Slits couldn't afford the new bottles, returnable bottles, so Budweiser was picking up the tab for all of them because they were interchangeable. So that's when they came out with this longneck, and it was a new one. It was a non-returnable bottle, and they put their A in Eagle on it to force the other breweries to come out and produce their own bottles. So then in the college markets, when the kids were thrown away,

the students were throwing away the bottles, they were non-returnable, which saved the brewery a lot of money.

JE: On Grand Lake, is it true that you took a boat up there and drove around the lake with the Bud girls and all?

DC: Well, I was able, after two years, Frederick, my partner, his mother found out he was in the wholesale beer business, and she wanted him to get out, so I was real fortunate. I was able to buy him out on a very attractive finance deal where I paid him, I think, so much a case, and also paid him rent for his half of the warehouse, or, you know, I was able then also to buy the distributorship in Miami, which included Grand Lake.

So my thoughts were, everybody's drinking Coors in Norman and Stillwater, and the college students would go home on the weekends or holidays, and they would convince me, convince all the high school seniors and their parents, everybody was drinking Coors. So my thought was, if we could get the college students in Norman and Stillwater to switch over to Budweiser, that was the secret.

And I realized that the college students were hanging out at Grand Lake and Dripping Springs in the summertime, so if I could get those students at Dripping Springs to switch from Coors to Bud, that's the way we're going to get our share of the business. So we ran promotions for 12 years on Memorial Day, Fourth of July, and Labor Day. And we had Budweiser boats, we had two boats, and on weekends, we would go over to Dripping Springs, and we had a band on one of the boats, and we had the Bud girls in Budweiser swimming suits, and we gave away hats, T-shirts, keychains, and all kinds of...

JE: Did you give away beer? Did you give the beer away?

DC: No, we didn't give any beer away.

JE: Okay. But anyway, you've got that presence. And I believe the kind of boat was a Sea Ray, Amberjack.

DC: Right. Our first boat was a web craft. And Bill Webb helped us design it, and we had Budweiser on both sides of it, and Bill thought it'd be nice to put my name, Denny, on one side and Gail's on the other side, and so the first Budweiser boat, we sent a picture of it up to St. Louis, and August Bush saw it, and he thought it belonged to Denny Long, the president of Anheuser-Busch, and he jumped him out, and he said, did somebody give you a boat?

And no, no, no, that's not a... It was the wholesaler's boat, but we found out that we couldn't get quite enough beer on the web craft, so we were fortunate enough to buy an Amberjack, which was a day old, day cruiser that Sea Ray made for fishing, and we brought it to Grand Lake, and we had 22 accounts on the lake that sold beer, and we found out it was less expensive to deliver to those marinas by boat, especially on the east side of Grand Lake, over by Big Hollow, where it was 12 miles from the highway between Jay and Grove, on gravel roads, to deliver the beer with the sharp rocks that would blow out tires and everything, so we had plenty of volunteers to go out on Wednesday, go around and take the orders, and then we'd deliver the beer on Thursday to all the marinas, and one summer, my son John and his cousin David, they were the salesmen, and went around on Wednesdays and picked up the orders, and they water skied at the same time, getting paid to write the orders, they got to water ski, but the Amberjack was mainly manufactured by Sea Ray for offshore fishing, and all of a sudden, because it was really a nice day cruiser, it was a 32-foot boat, Harbors View Marina had sold eight or ten of these Amberjacks, and the factory called from Knoxville, and they thought that Pete and Jim Houser were buying the boats and then bootlegging and selling them back to the coastal waters for fishing, and they said no, that it was actually for day cruising.

JE: Yeah, and I have an Amberjack boat right now.

DC: Oh, great.

JE: Yeah, I've enjoyed it for, I've had it for 12 to 15 years, and I've loved it, and you're the guy who brought Amberjack to Grand Lake.

DC: That's correct.

JE: Yeah, it's a great boat. It's a great, great boat, right. But then you began to increase your territory, didn't you?

DC: Yes, we had, of course, Bartlesville and Miami, and then Jack and Dick Bryan had the Veneta, Claremore, prior territory that they serviced out of, with one man, one truck, out of Veneta back in the Coors Hay Day, and they sold me the Veneta territory, and then later I was able to purchase the Lawton territory, Fort Sill, which was, by the way, 250 miles from the other end of the state, but a year later I was able to purchase the Ardmore territory, which adjoined Lawton, so we were, then we had two pretty good-sized territories at each end of the state.

JE: Well, your son John joins you in the business, too, doesn't he?

DC: Yes, at that time, when John got graduated from college, I tried to get him a job with Anheuser-Busch, and we, after about a couple months, they did give John a job, and he ended up going to work for the Denver branch. Myself and some of the other bud wholesalers were talking to St. Louis, and we thought it would be good for the children, young adults, that were in the wholesaler family to work a few years for the brewery, so they would understand that side of the business.

So John worked for six months in Denver, and I had lost my manager down in Ardmore and Lawton, and he had moved to another place, another distributorship in the southeast, so John came back and started in Ardmore, and then he also worked in Lawton, so he was managing the Lawton and the Ardmore distributorship.

JE: And then you got into the Oklahoma City territory.

DC: We were able to talk to the Brown family in Oklahoma City. Walt Brown, the owner, he'd retired, and his son, Mike, wasn't as interested in the beer business as his parents were, and they actually had a brewery rep managing the distributorship to help him out, and he liked to hunt and fish, and so they decided to sell the distributorship, and we negotiated a deal and eventually was able to purchase it.

Ninety days after we purchased it, Anheuser-Busch owned the Tulsa distributorship, and they asked to buy northeast Oklahoma, which included the Bartlesville, Veneta, Miami, Grand Lake area, and I took Anheuser-Busch stock in the deal.

JE: So that was like in February 2000?

DC: Yes, yes, that was it.

JE: Okay, I'll just say, so Premium Beers ended in February 2000.

DC: Premium Beers in northeast Oklahoma ended. It was a $500 corporation, and I took Anheuser-Busch stock, and it split two or three times after that, and I might mention that all during the 70s, I had all those other brands, and I had the original company was Northeast Distributing Company, and the Miller Brewing Company got bought out by Philip Morris in the 70s, and there were eight Miller Budweiser wholesalers in the state, and the Miller people had introduced the Miller Ponies, the little seven ounce bottles, and then they introduced Miller Lite, and their sales were coming on strong, and they thought they could overtake Anheuser-Busch.

It didn't happen, but the Miller people wanted to get away from the Budweiser wholesalers in Oklahoma, and eventually Miller ended up over in all the other Miller warehouses, and Budweiser, the wholesalers, sold it, and it was probably a mistake for the Philip Morris people where they thought that they could overtake Anheuser-Busch.

Anheuser-Busch was kind of a sleeping bag, and it was a sleeping giant in those days. They started a program called Sense of Urgency, and Miller never did catch up with Anheuser-Busch. But they did get rid of all their Bud wholesalers in Oklahoma.

JE: By purchasing them, you got rid of all their Bud wholesalers in Oklahoma.

DC: I've sold, I sold my, all of us sold our Miller distributorships in that period around 1980. Miller introduced Miller Lite in the '70s, and they had bought a brewery in Chicago, Meister Brau. They had tried to introduce a Lite beer in Chicago back then, and it didn't go over. When they introduced Miller

Lite, they hired ex-NFL football players for the commercials.

They promoted less filling and slogans like that. With football players drinking the Lite beer, it changed the image of Lite beer. But the other breweries didn't pay much attention to it. A few years later, Anheuser-Busch introduced Budweiser Lite, a brand that they promoted running, bicycling. However, it just wasn't catching on.

In the '80s, I was on the Anheuser-Busch wholesaler panel for three years. We had a meeting out in California, and August Bush asked all of his executives at that meeting to leave, except his president and vice president of marketing. Then he started asking us, you know, what's wrong with Budweiser Lite.

This man from, and actually he was an older man from Maine, the wholesaler had worked for the brewery. He said, "August, it's too stiff, it's stale. This, you know, 'Bring out your best,' he says, 'you gotta make it funny, do something else.'" So that gave him the idea of, "Give me a Lite." If somebody had a cigar, they gave him a blowtorch to light his cigar. They were sitting at the bar and say, "Give me a Lite," and the lightning would flash. So that's how they were able to start eating away at the Miller Lite brand, and of course today, Bud Lite's the number one brand in the United States.

Chapter 11 – 9:22
August Bush

John Erling (JE): What was August Bush like?

Denny Cresap (DC): August Bush was very intimidating; he kind of scared people when he talked to you. In his younger days, he was really wild, and then he settled down. But if he asked you a question, if you didn't know the answer, you were better off to say, “August, I don't know, and I'll get back with you,” because he knew the answer.

JE: Was he a big man?

DC: No.

JE: So physically he wasn't intimidating; it was his personality.

DC: Well, he was smart. What happened in the 70s, when I told you about all the strikes in the beer business, you want to run your breweries at 80-90% capacity. Well, you can't produce enough beer in the summertime, so you got to build inventories in the spring. And Anheuser-Busch on a national basis was always running short of beer in the summertime.

And Gussie Bush didn't want to spend the money to build breweries or add on the capacity of the ones they had. And Gussie, he didn't like computers or anything else like that. So in the 70s, August did a coup with the board of directors and took over as president, and Gussie and August didn't talk to each other for about two or three years.

JE: So Gussie was?

DC: His father, August Junior, August Bush Junior. He was third generation. August started hiring people from the Wharton School of Business. Professor Acoff was the man that was really good at marketing and everything at the university, at Wharton School of Business. And they started with computers and upgrading everything, and that really helped their business. He built the business, and he believed in a loud noise factor, is the way he used to put it, and the advertising money they spent increased, and they got up to over $300 million a year on advertising.

JE: You know, it's interesting because, as you've talked about, Budweiser languished, and Coors was big, and we can just kind of assume today that Budweiser is the name, and it wasn't always the beer. It was because of very wise business decisions that August Bush made.

DC: And the advertising, and the Clydesdales, and when I got into the business in '68, of course, Coors was a regional brand from Kansas and Oklahoma to California, but the sales were strong in that part of the country. But the Bush family and the Coors family were close friends, and they'd go skiing together out in Colorado and everything, and we'd keep

talking about this Coors brand, and they didn't really pay much attention to it in those days. It was more of just a regional brand.

And prior to my getting into the business when I worked for National Distillers, beer was more cyclical in Oklahoma like I was in Oklahoma. So, like I'd said earlier, Slits was the number one brand in the early '50s, and then also along came Falstaff for a year or two in the '50s was the number one brand in Oklahoma, and then Anheuser-Busch introduced Bush Bavarian, and it was number one for a year. In the late '50s, Coors became number one, and it stayed number one until like 1977. The number one brand wasn't changing every two or three years.

JE: You know, and this wasn't all on taste at all. I mean, beer is beer, let's face it, right? I know you would probably say, no, there's different tastes.

DC: Well, there is a different taste.

JE: Right, but that really wasn't what was driving it. It wasn't the promotion of it and all. That would be a bigger factor.

DC: The advertising had a lot to do with it, and Anheuser-Busch, they had taken the baseball. They sponsored 80% of the baseball teams. They sponsored 75, 80% of the NFL teams, the basketball, NBA teams. They really got into the sports, which helped them. Two things that might interest you more, Coors always had OU sports, and Coors decided that they weren't going to sponsor OU football one year, so Barry Switzer picked up the phone and called St. Louis to speak to Anheuser-Busch, and the secretary said, “who, who's this calling?” She didn't know who Barry Switzer was, and he had to explain to the secretary who he was, and she said, well, “August and Mike Rorty are out in California.” I'll put you through to them.

So Mike Rorty, who looked like Bob Hope, and when they had the national conventions, he entertained on the stage like Bob Hope, knew Barry Switzer, and he said, “what can I do for you?” And he said, “well, I'd like for you to sponsor OU football”, and he turned to August, and August said, “okay, we'll do it.”

Well, a few days later, he got a call from Barry, and he said, Mike, “would your son like to come down to OU and hang out on the sidelines for a couple OU football games?” And Mike said, “well, that's awful kind of you to ask, but he said, really, my son's tied up right now.” Barry said, well, what's he doing? He said, “well, right now, my son's up in New York, and he's the bat boy for the Yankees.”

JE: So that's how Budweiser got to OU?

DC: That's how, and then they, the coaches stopped drinking Coors and switched over to Bud and Bud Light, and up until the time we sold our company when we had Oklahoma City and Norman, we furnished Bud Light after every game over at Bob Stoops' house for the coaches that came in.

And that's how they analyzed the game. One time, these young people came into St. Louis and got an appointment to see Mike Rorty and said they had a new idea, and they wanted to start this cable network, but they needed some seed money to really get it going. And if Anheuser-Busch would help them get this going, they'd give them the exclusivity beer advertising for the first 10 years that they're in business. And Mike said, well, “how much money are we talking about?”

And they said $5 million. And so August and Mike decided they'd buy $5 million worth of advertising for a 10-year exclusive on beer advertising on television, and these were the people that put together ESPN.

JE: Oh.

DC: Yeah. One other story that's kind of interesting. Daddy Long and Mike Rorty, Mike Rorty were in Ireland. They were making Budweiser in Ireland with the same recipe as St. Louis, and they flew over there, and they asked the people over there, “what can we do to really get Budweiser off the ground with the people in Ireland?”

And these people said, well, what you need to do is sponsor the Irish Derby, and that would really help you because there was a lot of Guinness and everything. Being drunk over there. And today, Budweiser's the number

one imported beer in Ireland. But they said, well, what's it going to cost to sponsor the Irish Derby? And they said, “oh, at least $2 or $3 million a year.” And they said, okay. They talked it over. We're going to do it because we want to make it a prominent brand in Ireland.

So they're flying back to St. Louis, and Mike and Denny are looking at each other and telling them, “who's going to tell August the commitment we just made?”

JE: Do we know how that went over?

DC: It worked. And Bud's the number one. Oh, yeah, he bought into it because, like I said, his high noise level was advertising, and that's what made things happen.

JE: So Budweiser became the major seller in Ireland. In Ireland.

DC: Yeah.

JE: That's pretty great.

Chapter 12 – 8:45
ESPN CNN

John Erling (JE): Okay, so when did you get out of the distributorship business?

Denny Cresap (DC): We got out on December 31, 2011. This was shortly after Anheuser-Busch had sold out to the InBev people, and it just wasn't like it used to be, a family-run business. And the InBev people were three families in Belgium and three families in Brazil, and they're bankers.

JE: So it became a cold experience then for everybody. It was just dollars and cents. The name of your book is Making Friends Was My Business.

DC: Right.

JE: And that's been your philosophy all these years, which has got you to where you are today, as a matter of fact.

DC: Well, looking back, after I got out of the Army and I didn't know what I was going to do, and that first connection that I made when I was in grade school in Chicago, and then the connection with Oklahoma went wet with Jack Hansen, and I had all my fraternity brothers in Oklahoma City, including Ed Turner from Bartlesville, and he helped me promote brands.

We had the first billboard in Oklahoma City, and Ed Turner graduated from OU and went to work for WKYTV, and he did the 6 and the 10 o'clock news in Oklahoma City, and he helped us get some exposure of our brands when they were writing the liquor laws and the first billboards and the first truckload of liquor coming into Oklahoma. It was a semi-load of Old Crow. So he did real well helping us. He helped us kind of get things going. He left Channel 9 to be Bud Wilkinson's press secretary when Bud ran for U.S. Senate, and when they lost the election and Fred Harris beat Bud, they were really depressed.

He couldn't figure out what went wrong that Fred Harris would beat Bud Wilkinson, and Ed ended up going to work for Metro Media back east and helped expand their news department, and they had TV stations in New York, Washington, D.C., Baltimore, and some on the West Coast. He got a phone call one day from Ted Turner in Atlanta. Ted told him that he was going to start a new cable 24-7 television station, CNN, and he wanted him to come and help him put it together.

So Ed went to work for Ted Turner along with three other gentlemen, and that was Ted Turner. That was the beginning of CNN. He was executive vice president of CNN for a number of years, and we were actually in Atlanta one time for a Budweiser convention, and Gail and John and I went over to the CNN headquarters and had lunch with us, and he gave us a private tour through the facility.

The headquarters was downtown next to the football stadium, and it had been a... hotel that went bankrupt, and Ted Turner was going to build a new facility on the edge of Atlanta, and the city made him a deal that if he

would take over that hotel, they would let him have it for, I think it was like $20 million, and when we were there, Ed said it was worth $150 million because of its location, and his executive offices were a hotel suite, and he was going to build a new facility for Ted Turner.

JE: And I know you've done various things here, but you've set up a foundation, the Cresap Family Foundation.

DC: When we sold out, we created the Cresap Family Foundation, and we've had it now for about four years, and we've been trying to help communities in northeast Oklahoma, and Oklahoma City, and southwest Oklahoma work. We made... our money selling Budweiser. So we've... up in northeastern Oklahoma, we're supporting like six different rural fire departments.

We've... we've helped out with two or three different drug programs that have been put on in schools in Craig County. We bought... furnished some computers for the third and fourth grade at the Veneta Grade School.

JE: In Veneta, I know I was there, the dedication of PAWS.

DC: We... we were very much involved in the new animal shelter in... in Veneta, and we're... taking... receiving a lot of dogs, and there's more dogs than there are people to adopt the dogs. And in the last 90 days, we've made connections in Denver, Cheyenne, Wyoming, and Colorado Springs, and we've already transferred 200 dogs from the Veneta facility to those three communities.

And just last week, they... one of them in Denver told us they want us to bring them 40 or 50 dogs every two weeks. So we're getting a new van to... transfer dogs out there, and the reason is in Colorado and Wyoming, they've got very strict spay and neuter laws, and what we're doing is there's such a demand that we... we're socializing these dogs in Veneta and taking their pictures and everything, and on the web, and then the people in Colorado, Colorado can get on the website and pick out a dog they like.

And a few weeks ago, we... the van went out to Denver, and it got there

overnight at 9 o'clock in the morning to the shelter out there, and the people were already in line to pick... pick up their dogs.

JE: Isn't that wonderful? Because a lot of these dogs might have been put down.

DC: That's correct.

JE: If you hadn't... you have obviously... you do not put dogs down there at your facility in Veneta.

DC: No.

JE: And so they've been given a new life. And it's interesting in Colorado, you would think there'd be enough dogs in Colorado, but apparently not.

DC: And also, I believe there's animals... dogs also going up to Wisconsin and Minnesota. But there's a great demand for dogs in some of these other states, so these dogs are finding homes, and it's... we feel that it's going to get better, and we think it's going to expand throughout the whole rural part of Oklahoma. And we were... they had 250 dogs in Bartlesville here last month, and we've been taking dogs also from Bartlesville, and bringing them to Veneta, and then shipping them out to Colorado.

JE: Do you feel a need that you want to establish another one someplace else, or you don't...

DC: There is a possibility.

JE: The shelter there in Veneta, this became a bigger thing than maybe you could even imagine, adopting dogs to other states.

DC: Well, there were so many dogs coming in, we had to figure out what to do with them.

JE: So then that's when you went out...

DC: So that's when we figured that our mission changed from just, you know, rescuing dogs and getting local people to adopt them when 75% of...This is what's scary. 75% of the dogs we're getting are being surrendered by people. They're not stray dogs. I don't know if they just can't afford to feed them or what. It's pretty sad.

Chapter 13 – 8:27
Clydesdales

John Erling (JE): And you've been a supporter of Home of Hope, haven't you, as well?

Denny Cresap (DC): Yes. We've been supporting Home of Hope for years. Jane Hartley, one of the founders of it, we've known since the 1950s, Jane and Bob Hartley.

JE: And they had a son who was mentally challenged. And so that's why Home of Hope is...

DC: That's how it got started.

JE: And you've been a...

DC: We... Last year, Chesapeake has a sponsorship of the food bank in Oklahoma City. They cover 50-some counties. And I don't know if you're familiar with this food bank, but it started this with nothing. And Chesapeake was donating a million dollars. And last year, they backed off and said, you know, because of the oil economy, they couldn't do it.

So we... They said they were only going to come up with $500,000. So we put up $500,000 last Christmas. And we... Matching funds. And it worked. They got another million in donations. So I don't know. I guess we'll probably do it again this year, too. But two weeks ago, John, he used to like to ride on the beer trucks with our employees and deliver beer for holidays. And we'd, you know, build displays and everything. And a couple of weeks

ago, he got on one of the food trucks and rode around where they distributed the food and everything.

JE: That's great. Tell us about the Clydesdales, that when they're retired, they put a pasture on your ranch, which is north of...

DC: Well, a few years ago, probably 15 years ago now, John and Jim Poole, the manager of the Clydesdales in St. Louis, they had a ranch. And they were pretty good friends. And he asked John if we'd like to have some of the retirees. So the first number, we had three retirees that we took. And the retirees are anywhere from 16 to 17 years old. And they'll live to 20 to 22. We had to sign a contract that we wouldn't show them or anything.

Of course, they're big babies and we couldn't give them a bath every day like they get with the brewery. So we had three. And then over the years, we've had as many as 12 retirees at our ranch. And right now, we just have two. But we had some real interesting horses. The one that comes to mind is John got a call from St. Louis. And Jim said, “we need to retire Reggie. He's getting pretty old. He's one of the lead horses.” And, “would you like to have Reggie?” And John said,”oh, that'll be fine. But who's Reggie?”

After 9-11, they did a TV commercial of the Clydesdales coming across the Brooklyn Bridge. And at the end of the bridge, they stopped and the one horse bowed down in remembrance for everybody that passed away at 9-11. And that was Reggie. So we had him at our ranch for about two years before he passed away.

DC: What kind of animals are they?

JE: They're big. They weigh about 2,000 pounds. And they've, Anheuser-Busch has had them since the repeal of prohibition. They actually took an eight horse hitch at repeal in 1933 and took it down Pennsylvania Avenue with a case of beer for President Roosevelt.

DC: But their spirit, what's their spirit like?

JE: Well, they're trained not to they're pretty tame after they train them. Of course, they work with them and they make sure that when they're in a

parade or something that they won't get spooked if a little child ran out in the street or something like that. But they just had one team for years out of St. Louis.

And back in the early days, they wouldn't even let the team go into Texas or Oklahoma in the summertime. They thought it was too much heat. But eventually, they have five teams scattered around the country. And each team consists of ten horses, two spares, the wagon, the three semi-trailers, and six employees.

Each one of these group of teams is about a $5 million investment. And then they have all this patent leather harness and everything that at one time, a man from the old country in Pennsylvania made it all. And now they've got two or three places where they have the patent leather harness made.

And they have certain farriers that'll shoe them every so often. But they actually, even when they're out on the road, they train them. And we had them come to all of our grand openings of our new warehouses around the state. They'd come and spend a week with us. And when we opened the new Veneta warehouse, we had to get Timothy, from the racetrack in Oklahoma City. For a week, for the ten horses, we had to get 300 pounds of carrots.

DC: They're a pretty gentle animal, aren't they?

DC: They're called the gentle giants.

JE: Yeah.

DC: When Gussie Bush was alive, they had them there at Grant's Farm, and that was the breeding and everything. But after he passed away, they moved the breeding operation to Southern California. But a few years ago, they brought it back to Boonville, Missouri. And they have about 250, 300 horses there. They're training and breeding all the time.

JE: Why did they select, where did that idea come from, to have these Clydesdales be a spokesman, so to speak, for Budweiser?

DC: I've got a book at home. I can't answer that. I don't know how Gussie found out or did it, but he sent people to Belgium to buy the horses. And they decided, well, we're going to have to get rid of them. And they started in the 1930s. That was pretty clever. That wagon that we had at our grand openings was a 1903 Studebaker wagon. Studebaker Company made wagons before they made cars.

JE: Oh. You've been an astute businessman. And it shows you don't have to graduate from college to have a business degree to be one.

DC: Well, that's true. Yeah.

JE: But you've had, not everybody could handle all this if you didn't have something in you that you were born with in business. Don't you agree?

DC: Well, Gail kept saying, “are you sure? You keep buying these trucks. You keep buying these trucks”, you know. And I said, “well, it's an image business.” And that's what, back in the days when Coors had all the business, they had all the new trucks, new paint. All their employees were in uniforms.

Clean cut. Some of the other wholesalers, their people were in, they needed a shave or they needed a haircut. They were in shorts. They were in t-shirts. And it didn't have the right image. When you stop and think about it, wives are in these grocery stores and everything. If they see somebody stocking the shelves and everything, and a person doesn't have a good appearance, it's going to affect the image or whatever they're handling.

So we were able to eventually get our people in uniforms and we got them in new trucks and the new clean trucks going up and down the street and everything. And subconsciously, that really helped the image. And maybe people, you know, the housewife really didn't say, well, he sure looks dirty. I'm not going to buy that six pack of beer he's had. But subconsciously, I think some of the consumers could relate to the appearance of who represented these companies.

Chapter 14 – 6:20
Making Friends

John Erling (JE): Young people want to be in business today at all. Do you talk to them? Do you have any advice for young people?

Denny Cresap (DC): You need to find a niche and just work hard at it and don't give up.

JE: A lot of people say you've got to like what you do. You liked what you were doing all the time.

DC: That makes a big difference. If you like what you're doing. If you don't like what you're doing, you better find something that you like doing when you get up every morning.

JE: And then you liked people naturally.

DC: Yeah. And you have to make connections and you've got to talk to people at their level. You know, depending on the circumstances of where you are. And Jack Hanson was my mentor. He had been a cigar salesman and candy salesman for Niles and Mosier years ago out of Joplin.

Believe it or not, he retired over in Bella Vista and I had him over to Grand Lake one time and we went to Arrowhead for dinner. And we're sitting there and I introduced him to Joe Harwood. And he said, Harwood, Harwood, are you from Kansas? And he said yes.

JE: Joe said yes.

DC: And Elmer and his wife were still there at that time, alive.

JE: Joe's parents.

DC: Yeah. And he said, well, “I used to sell cigars, tobacco products and candy in Humboldt, Kansas.” Turned out that Joe's father had a service station in

Humboldt. And this service station was one of Jack's best customers. And Joe's grandfather would give candy to the kids all the time when the parents came to get gasoline. So everybody, they bought gasoline there for the candy. And Jack knew his grandfather.

JE: Yeah.

DC: But Jack, when we'd go to a distributorship, sometimes he said, “go in the back of the car, go in the back door and see what's going on in the warehouse and talk to the guys filling the orders or talk to the truck drivers and talk to those people first before you talk to the management people and you'll probably find a lot more what's going on.”

And he said, “learn the wedding anniversaries of some of the secretaries or when their birthdays are and things like that.” Or a retailer, when his wedding anniversary is. Or your customers' anniversaries, birthdays and things like that. And remember them when those things happen. And you don't give up on a sale because most sales aren't made the first or second time.

But once you make a relationship with a customer, and it's a good relationship, why, you're going to keep that customer and he's not going to switch to somebody else just for price.

JE: Are you pretty amazed when you look back at your life?

DC: Yeah, I really didn't realize it until Frank Robinson talked John Hughes into doing his book. And I read John Hughes' book and John, my son, said, “well, we ought to do one on your life history.” And I didn't think I could do it. And then I started thinking about it and I started out in 10-year segments and then I got down to 5-year segments. And for some reason, as it went along, it just started flowing.

I remembered things that happened through the years. And it dawned on me, if I hadn't met so-and-so, if I hadn't met Cab Renick in the liquor store, and years later he shows up at the Ford dealership and tells me about the Bud distributorship, and then Frederick Dreyfuss, and the other guy that was coming, the rancher sold him pickups and his fraternity brother was a

Bud wholesaler in Fort Smith. And everything just kind of falls in place as you go through life.

JE: A plan bigger than you and I that was made for you, yeah. It's pretty amazing. So how would you like to be remembered?

DC: As the Bud man. We had, well, it was funny, when that Bud man character first came out, I had a new Ford van and I put the Bud man on the side of the van and John was in grade school at that time and once in a while Gail would go over to the school to pick John up in the Bud man van and all the other kids thought it was cool but John was embarrassed.

JE: Well, you know, you're a friend, an easy person to approach and talk to, so you had that going for you. Not everybody has that. On top of that, you have this easy personality and then you like people and it all worked for you and that's what came up with the name of your book, Making Friends Was My Business. And then if you make friends, then all these other things happen.

DC: They fall in place. You know, I kind of plagiarized it, I guess. Anheuser-Busch had that saying, making friends is our business. Anheuser-Busch was a fantastic family corporation for years and it used to be that you got out of college and you went to work for a company and your whole life's career could end up being with one company but today that doesn't happen.

JE: You came along at a good time. You did. Well, Denny, I want to thank you for this time.

DC: Well, I enjoyed visiting with you. I've been telling you some of my stories.

JE: Yep. How you can remember all that's beyond me, but it's great and I'm glad that you did. Thank you so much. Appreciate it.

DC: Well, thank you for having me.