



# Julius Pegues

First Black Varsity Basketball Player at Pittsburgh University, USAF Weather Forecaster, FAA Advisor, Activist

## Chapter 01 – Introduction

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**Announcer:** Julius Pegues, was the first black varsity basketball player at Pittsburgh University, and went on to serve in the U.S. Air Force as a weather forecaster and later as an advisor to the Federal Aviation Administration.

A star basketball player at Booker T. Washington High School in Tulsa, Julius was forced to matriculate to Pitt because Oklahoma University, Oklahoma State, and Tulsa did not have any Black players.

Julius quickly transitioned from a walk-on to a scholarship player after averaging 20 points per game in his first month. He finished as one of only 34 players in the program's history to score 1,000 career points. The NBA's St. Louis Hawks picked Pegues in the fourth round of the 1958 draft, but he had to serve in the military as he was in the Air Force ROTC at Pitt.

He studied meteorology at Saint Louis University and became an Air Force weather forecaster before returning to Tulsa to work for Douglas Aircraft and American Airlines — eventually landing as a consultant for the Federal Aviation Administration.

In Tulsa, he was best known for his work to memorialize Tulsa's 1921 Race Massacre and the history and culture of Black Tulsans through the John Hope Franklin Center for Reconciliation. His efforts laid the groundwork for the Greenwood Rising History Center.

Julius was 86 when he died March 29, 2022.

Listen to Julius Pegues as he tells his life story on [Voices of Oklahoma.com](https://www.voicesofoklahoma.com).

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**Chapter 02 – 8:32**  
**Julius at 3 Years Old**

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**John Erling (JE):** My name is John Erling. Today's date is February 24th, 2010. And, Julius, state your full name, please.

**Julius Pegues (JP):** My name is Julius Pegues. I was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma at Moton Hospital, May the 5th, 1935.

**JE:** Your present age is?

**JP:** 74.

**JE:** Where are we recording this interview?

**JP:** At the Greenwood Cultural Center in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

**JE:** Your mother's name?

**JP:** Patella Latimer Pegues. And my father's name is Allen Pegues.

**JE:** Where was your mother born and raised?

**JP:** My mother was born in Anderson, South Carolina. And my mother was one of 13 siblings. She had two older brothers that were educated at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Her oldest brother had married a young lady from Tulsa named Sylvetta Wright.

When he returned from World War I, he came to Tulsa and married. He was here during the race riot. He had also encouraged my mother's second-oldest brother to move from Arkansas over to Tulsa because there was a lot of opportunity in the building industry. And they had just completed the Mount Zion Baptist Church, when the church was subsequently burned down six weeks later during the race riot.

**JE:** 1921, race riot.

**JP:** 1921 race riot. All of my mother's brothers were graduates of Tuskegee Institute and all of her sisters attended Tuskegee also. My mother was the only child in her family that did not attend Tuskegee Institute because her mother was ailing and my mother stayed to take care of her.

**JE:** How did your mother make it to Oklahoma?

**JP:** My mother came to Oklahoma about five months after the race riot. My grandfather was a carpenter also. And my mother's oldest brother urged my grandfather to bring the family to Tulsa because, after the race riot, there were plenty of job opportunities and a lot of work to be done, which wasn't the case back in Anderson, South Carolina. So my grandfather moved the whole family to Tulsa, Oklahoma in October of 1921.

**JE:** Your father?

**JP:** My father was born in Arkansas — over at Lockesburg, Arkansas. My father was one of six siblings. Ironically, my mother is a twin and my father is a twin; and there are no twins in my family, okay? (Chuckling).

But my father came to Tulsa in about 1927 or so from Lockesburg, Arkansas. He had lived down in Texarkana, Texas. He just heard about Tulsa and he caught the train and rode the train all the way to Tulsa.

**JE:** What did he do as a living?

**JP:** My father started out as a cook at the old Cecil Hospital down on Elgin Street. That's a long time ago.

**JE:** Cecil Hospital?

**JP:** I think it was Cecil Hospital. It was right down on Elgin Street — about eighth and Elgin? I might have the name wrong, but I think that was the name of it.

**JE:** And so he worked there?

**JP:** And so he was a cook at first. My father was very adept at repairing cars and he was a mechanical sort. He eventually ended up working for Tulsa Winch for, I think, 38 years. And, during the war time, he built the biggest winch that Tulsa Winch built for the army.

**JE:** Explain what a winch is.

**JP:** A winch is a mechanism that they put a cable around and it's used for hoisting things and pulling things. They had these winches installed on all of our tanks and all of our heavy trucks. And my father built the biggest one. He built one per hour, 10 hours a day, six days a week. The owner of the Tulsa Winch was H. L. Pray, H L. Pray was a Tulsan. And when H. L. Pray sold the Tulsa Winch to Vickers, he had a clause in there that they could not lay off two individuals who had been with him since he started and that was Lonnie McCoy and Allen Pegues, Sr..

**JE:** Did you have brothers and sisters?

**JP:** Yes. I have seven brothers and sisters. I have two brothers older than I am and one sister; and I have two brothers younger than I am, and three sisters. One of my sisters passed away before she was two years old.

**JE:** Where in Tulsa did you live?

**JP:** On the north side. I lived at 768 East Queen Place — that's between Midland and Madison in the 700 block of Queen Place. Queen Place is three blocks north of Pine Street.

**JE:** What do you remember about those days as you were growing up?

**JP:** I remember a lot about those days. I attended elementary school at Dunbar Elementary School, and I started to school when I was three years old because they had a special program at our elementary school that some of us started to school when we were three years old.

**JE:** And that was unusual, wasn't it?

**JP:** That was unusual. I just had an enjoyable elementary school time. My teachers were just wonderful. John Hope Franklin and I laugh when we see one another because we can remember our elementary school teachers now. That's how much we enjoyed elementary school because we really had some good teachers.

**JE:** John Hope Franklin was a classmate of yours?

**JP:** No. John Hope Franklin was older. John Hope Franklin graduated from Booker T Washington High School in 1930 with my uncle, Fred Latimer. I graduated from Booker T Washington High School in 1953.

**JE:** Okay. But he remembered some of the same teachers?

**JP:** Oh, yes! John Hope Franklin could name all of the teachers that he had in elementary, junior high, and high school. And I can do the same thing.

**JE:** But many of them were the same.

**JP:** Some of them in the high school were the same teachers that I had. I had none in the elementary or junior high.

**JE:** Where did you go for junior high?

**JP:** George Washington Carver Junior high school at 628 East Oklahoma.

**JE:** Right. Out of Carver, you go to Booker T Washington.

**JP:** Right.

**JE:** For four years.

**JP:** No, no; I only went to Booker T Washington High school for three years because, back then, the grade schools were pre-K to sixth grade; junior high was 7th, 8th and 9th; and high school was 10, 11 and 12th.

**JE:** Tell us about Booker T and your experience there.

**JP:** Just a great high school experience. I think we must have had the best high school faculty in the country; because we had excellent science teachers; we had excellent english teachers, and we had an athletic program for those sports that we participated in that was second to none. We are one of the teams that went undefeated here in the state of Oklahoma when I was a senior in high school.

**JE:** In 53?

**JP:** In 53.

**JE:** And you graduated in 53?

**JP:** In 53 and I was the valedictorian of my high school class.

### **Chapter 03 – 5:40**

#### **Booker T. Washington High School**

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**John Erling (JE):** Describe Booker T. then. Now, as it is today, it's a magnet school.

**Julius Pegues (JP):** Back then it was an all-black high school with an all-black faculty — an excellent faculty. After World War II, E. W. Woods had tried for years to get a new high school for the African-American children or for the black children. The high school was located not far from here on Easton Street, right where OSU is located. He had been unsuccessful in doing so.

So I am told that one day he told the superintendent, “Well, if you can't build a new high school for my students, then we're all gonna go to Central.”

Consequently, we ended up with a new high school located way out north. The land for the new high school was donated by a local black businessman and my class was the first class to go to the new high school — all three years — and it was located out on Woodrow Street. I started Booker T Washington High School in September of 1950.

**JE:** Who was E.W. Woods?

**JP:** E.W. Woods was the first and only principal of Booker T Washington High School from the time of its inception until he died in 1948. He was there for 35 years. E.W. Woods was a principal that just did a magnificent job of developing black children. His motto was: "You have to be better than 95% of the students, and you have to be as good as the other five."

**JE:** Let me come back to this threat. When EW Woods said, in a threatening manner, I suppose, "If you don't build a high school for us here, we're gonna go to Tulsa Central." — which was predominantly white.

**JP:** All white. (Chuckling)

**JE:** All right. And so there is some humor in that, I suppose, as he said, "Ooh. Now he has our attention."

**JP:** Yeah. Up until that time, you see, all of our schools have been built by the county and the county built the new high school. The city did not build the Booker T. Washington High School that they started to build in 1948. The county built that school and I have the pictures of the groundbreaking which included the county officials because Mr. Woods had been going back and forth to see the governor about a new high school. They eventually worked it out for us to get a new high school.

Now there was one thing about that school when it was built. See, Mr. Woods died just as they started building the high school and my high school coach — Seymour Williams and Ulysses S. Mitchell — they would go to the high school because we were supposed to get a large gymnasium because you had to come to the games early in order to get a seat, see?

The old Booker T Washington High School did not have a gym where you could have people coming to see the basketball games. So they played their basketball games at Carver Junior High School. Carver had a gym larger than Booker T's gym. Booker T just had a teaching gym. All of the games they played were played at Carver Junior High School.

In the initial drawings, they had ensured that we had a gym larger than Carver Junior High School's gym. But after Mr. Woods died, our coach, Seymour Williams, kept going and watching the construction and he noticed that there was something strange about the building.

It eventually ended up real strange because we had a gym that was the size of Carver's gym; and we had a swimming pool that you could only teach students to swim in. You couldn't watch. The way they cut it down, you could not watch the swimming meets, but we put up with that too. I mean it wasn't okay, but that's all that they did for us.

The new Booker T Washington High School faces Apache Street — faces north — and the Booker T Washington High School that I went to faces west. It's up on Woodrow; and the access to the new one is a block south of Apache and Apache is running east and west. The one that I attended has been torn down and they just left the entryway to it, okay?

**JE:** Okay. Why was it torn down?

**JP:** Well, they built a new one only about three or four years ago.

**JE:** The Booker T Washington building, as we know it today, is a new one and not the one that you attended?

**JP:** Right.

**JE:** So they made many upgrades and made it even better, right?

**JP:** And they put a swimming pool in it like they had in the original one that they built in 1948; because when they cut the gym down, that meant that you didn't have a lowered swimming pool under it.

**JE:** But now they do?

**JP:** Now they do.



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**Chapter 04 – 6:00**  
**Shopping Downtown**

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**John Erling (JE):** While you attended Booker T Washington, you played some basketball.

**Julius Pegues (JP):** Yes.

**JE:** What position did you play?

**JP:** Guard and forward; and center if they needed me to play center.

**JE:** Because you were tall; I mean you're tall now.

**JP:** I was 6'3"

**JE:** In what grade?

**JP:** In the 10th grade.

**JE:** So you had somebody taller than that as a center?

**JP:** Yes.

**JE:** Who was that?

**JP:** Clarence Dixon, who played for Langston University And Clarence Dixon at Langston University came within one point of breaking Marcus Haynes scoring record.

**JE:** How did Booker T fare against other teams when you were playing on it? And you played all three years?

**JP:** I played all three years for Booker T Washington. Back then you had white school championships and then you had the black school championships. We had Class A, B, and C.

And the white schools had classes A, B, and C. But we didn't play one another. We were the state champions in Class A for the state of Oklahoma for the black schools in 1951, 52, and 53. I played on three state high school basketball championship teams.

**JE:** As players, did you want to play — and the whites wanted to play back and forth?

**JP:** Well, no, but Mr. Bridgewater — B. A. Bridgewater — Mr. Bridgewater that wrote for the Tulsa World; he tried to get the Tulsa Central team to play us because they were, I guess, supposed to be pretty good back then. They had a good team but they wouldn't play us — according to him, okay?

**JE:** Back in the 50s, for sure, segregation in Tulsa was predominant.

**JP:** Right.

**JE:** Let's talk about that. As a black, you would go to downtown Tulsa.

**JP:** Yes.

**JE:** How would you be received down there?

**JP:** Well, we would be received, sometimes, just like regular customers — other times, not so good. But we were taught to always be, you know, mindful of where you are and what you can do and don't cause any problems. That's the way we did it.

**JE:** So, you couldn't sit up to a lunch counter?

**JP:** No; couldn't eat downtown anywhere — except at the Coney Island place. There was a little place there, around the corner from the Tulsa World, that would serve us just like they served anyone else. You know that little Coney Island place — there on, what? 3rd street?

**JE:** Yeah.

**JP:** Yeah.

**JE:** — so that's...

**JP:** — that was the only place.

**JE:** ... that's been there for all these years?

**JP:** All these years.

**JE:** And they would serve you.

**JP:** Serve you. Right. You just go in and get your Coney Island just like everybody else.

**JE:** And they let you use the restroom?

**JP:** Yes.

**JE:** But all these other businesses — No restroom use at all.

**JP:** Right.

**JE:** You were 16, 17 years old.

**JP:** 16, 17, and 18.

**JE:** Was this going on in your brain? That “This isn't right. We need to fight this.”

**JP:** We had other things to do; and our teachers were very adept at teaching us that the most important thing is to get an education. Just get an education and things are different in other places. So that's what we were all about. We were taught that athletics is only a means to an end, okay? It is not the end. It's only a means to an end. You aren't gonna die if you lose a basketball game — although we played hard, we didn't intend to lose. (Chuckling)

**JE:** (Chuckling) You largely were in the Greenwood area right now, which was your town.

**JP:** This was my stomping ground.

**JE:** Right here.

**JP:** Right here. We had everything that we needed right in this area here.

**JE:** So, in a way, you didn't have to go downtown because you could buy clothes, and you could be eating, and everything you needed was right here.

**JP:** Right. And, is it true? Because I've heard other stories that you walk in and, say, to a store — Vanderver's or Clark's — I don't know if they put you out or not, but if you tried to buy something and even had money in your hand, they wouldn't accept it.

**JP:** No, I've never had that experience.

**JE:** Maybe you didn't try it.

**JP:** No, because I could go in Renberg's and feel very comfortable.

**JE:** You can shop?

**JP:** Shop just like everybody else.

**JE:** Alright. So some stores did accept you?

**JP:** Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

**JE:** But others didn't.

**JP:** Renberg's being one of one of my classmate's mother and her grandmother both worked for the Renbergs and we could go in Renberg. If you had the money to buy you a pair of those Stacy Adams shoes, you go

back and sit down and try on your Stacy Adams; when they fit, pay for them.

**JE:** And you were treated with respect.

**JP:** Treated with respect. That's one thing I can say about Renberg's. Same thing over at Froug's — you were treated with respect at Froug's. And I've heard talk about some people being kind of slighted if they see a white customer, they'd go and wait on the white customers like you didn't have any money. But those things were overcome.

**JE:** Vanderver's — remember that?

**JP:** Vanderver's? Yes.

**JE:** Were they accepting of you?

**JP:** Yes.

**JE:** Clark's? Good clothes?

**JP:** Clark's. Clark's was right next door to Renberg's.

**JE:** So it wasn't a total shutdown.

**JP:** It wasn't a total shutdown. Mmm-mm (in rejection). It wasn't a total shutdown. Couldn't go to the theater, you know. (Laughing)

**JE:** Did you have your own?

**JP:** Oh, we had theaters. We had The Dreamland, and the Rex, and Peoria.

**JE:** Did you have the same movies playing?

**JP:** Yeah. Eventually all of the movies would get to us.

**JE:** Probably first run didn't come to you.

**JP:** No — come to the white theaters and we'll get them later.

**JE:** And I guess you just kind of accepted that as a way of life back then.

**JP:** Yeah. So what if you saw the movie six weeks later or eight weeks later?

**JE:** You probably processed more of that as you got older than when it was actually happening to you.

**JP:** Right.

## **Chapter 05 – 8:37**

### **Race Massacre**

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**John Erling (JE):** We referenced the 1921 race riot.

**Julius Pegues (JP):** Mhmm (In agreement)

**JE:** At that time — and we're talking about you now as being 17, 18 and just getting out of high school — what were you told and what did you know about the race riot?

**JP:** Well, I probably knew more about the race riot than the average person, because my two uncles were involved in the race riot and we were struggling as a church. See, I was a member of the Mount Zion baptist church and I worked with my uncles. My uncles, Jaffe Clinton Latimer and William Shakespeare Latimer, they told us about the riot, as a matter of fact.

The story goes around that my uncle JC — that's Jaffe Clinton — they had finished the Mount Zion baptist church. And, you see, my two uncles were two of the best bricklayers in town. So they worked for other white contractors. After they had finished the Mount Zion baptist church. My uncle JC had gone to work for somebody else; so had my uncle Shake.

When this riot broke out. My uncle JC — he didn't have a car; so he walked everywhere that he went. So he's on his way home, and they pick him up.

**JE:** “They?”

**JP:** White cops.

**JE:** National Guard, or?

**JP:** I don't know whether it's the National Guard but there were some officers

**JE:** Yeah.

**JP:** And they took him to jail. And the next morning, his boss got to work; and my uncle, normally, he was the first person on the job. So the boss gets there, he's looking around, sees who he has working, you know and he doesn't see my uncle.

He asked his white guys, “You all seen JC? this morning?”

Guys say “No. No, we haven't seen JC this morning.”

One guy said, “But you know — they were picking black people up yesterday, so he might have gotten picked up and taken to jail because he was walking home.”

The guy said, “Okay.”

He gets in his truck and he goes down to the police station. This is a white guy. Walks in and ask him, “Have you all got my brother in here?”  
(Chuckling)

The guy says, “No, we don't have any we don't have any white people in here.”

And he said, “I didn't ask you if you had any white people. I asked if you had my brother in here.” (Laughing)

So he said, "Who is your brother?"

He said, "JC Lattimer. You got JC Latimer back there?"

And somebody hollered up, says, "Yeah JC Latimer's back here."

He said, "Man, let my brother out of jail here; we have to go to work. We don't know what's going on here but my brother's gotta go to work."

Guy said, "JC Latimer! Come on out of there!"

And he walked out of the jail with his boss man and went on to work.  
(Laughing)

**JE:** So was that the day after?

**JP:** Yeah the race riots happened all night long and then carried into the next day. So he was on his way home that following day and they were rounding up black folk. And he wasn't at work the following morning.

**JE:** Interesting. They still went to work.

**JP:** Yeah. They were working on this building someplace away from the riot area here.

**JE:** Okay, right.

**JP:** But my uncle, wherever they were working, he had to walk home because he didn't have a car.

**JE:** What else did you hear about the race riot?

**JP:** That it was just devastating. It was just devastating. You know, all the houses were destroyed and it was just awful, they said. And they set about trying to rebuild.

**JE:** Did they talk about it in school?



**JP:** Nope. Nope. The only person who would talk about it is my high school coach, Seymour Williams. He was talking about how they were looting and burning. The school was right up here. If you look at these pictures, the only building that's not burnt is Booker T Washington High School. That was the school. That was the only building that wasn't burned to the ground.

**JE:** They didn't attempt to burn it?

**JP:** No. And that's where the Red Cross set up the relief station. Maurice Willows came from St. Louis for the Red Cross and that's where he operated out of: Booker T Washington High School.

**JE:** Dick Rowland, who was the young man who took the elevator, came out of the elevator and supposedly touched the white lady — forgotten her name right now.

**JP:** Paige.

**JE:** Yeah. Did they ever tell you whatever happened to him?

**JP:** Yeah. He and Paige got married up in Kansas City. (Laughing) That's true. Became man and wife.

**JE:** (Laughing) This is not funny.

**JP:** They became man and wife.

**JE:** And that's a fact.

**JP:** That's a fact. That's a fact.

**JE:** Of course, she never did want to press charges.

**JP:** No. Because they had been going together. (Laughing)

**JE:** They had some kind of relationship.

**JP:** They had some kind of relationship, right.

**JE:** So then why was it that she screamed?

**JP:** Well, I don't know that she screamed.

**JE:** That's part of the lore?

**JP:** Could be.

**JE:** So you yourself have wondered, "Did she really scream?"

**JP:** Did she really scream? Right.

**JE:** Well, then something —

**JP:** Somebody saw something.

**JE:** The lady who came out of Renberg's was supposedly first on the scene; and she's the one who told officers — or whatever — that she thought she heard a scream. She came out to see what it was and she saw Dick Rowland then coming out.

**JP:** Hello. (Laughing)

**JE:** So do we believe, then, that this race riot — aided by the Tulsa Tribune — actually started because of that lady who walked out of Renburg's, who may have misrepresented the truth?

**JP:** Right. Could very well have been.

**JE:** Am I leading you on?

**JP:** No — no!

**JE:** You're agreeing with what I'm saying?

**JP:** I'm agreeing with you.

**JE:** But the way it's written...

**JP:** Yeah. The way it's written, it would cause one to do things that they should not do. Because Greenwood was very prosperous during the time and there were overtures that certain individuals wanted this section of the city, see? And it was well known, but blacks weren't going to give it up. That has carried on for years. They had a report done by Hammerson and Green, which moved the central business district all the way to Pine Street — and this was in the 50s and 60 when this report came out. It's interesting.

**JE:** So then do you think that there's much more to the story that maybe city fathers of Tulsa wanted to move into this area and they took advantage of this —

**JP:** Oh, I think so.

**JE:** This scene?

**JP:** Yeah. They referred to it as a “riot.” This wasn’t a riot. This was a race of war. They just devastated the whole area. But blacks rebuilt.

**JE:** Yeah, I was gonna say that the whites still did not move in here.

**JP:** That's right; because the blacks still owned the land and they weren't about to give it up. So they rebuilt.

**JE:** I'm still taken with the fact that when he was held in jail and she didn't bring charges. Do you know, then, in the next days or weeks and so forth that they both head to Kansas City?

**JP:** They headed to Kansas City sometime because they ended up as man and wife.

**JE:** They have children?

**JP:** I don't know. I haven’t investigated that. But other people have.

**JE:** Have talked to descendants of that marriage?

**JP:** I don't know. But what I'm saying is other people have researched that — like the guy who wrote “Riot and Remembrance;” he researched all of that and found out that they were man and wife. They got married. And JB Stratford, they tried to make him the culprit in the riot — he owned the hotel. He fled to Kansas City with his family. The story was that they found out he was in Kansas City and they were gonna go to Kansas City to take care of him but then he moved on up to Chicago, and that's where he stayed for the remainder of his life.

But you take JB Stratford. He has an interesting family; I don't know how many of his children have become federal judges. You know, he was a lawyer.

**JE:** He was a wealthy man, wasn't he?

**JP:** Yeah. As a matter of fact, one of his grandsons came to Tulsa when they exonerated him. But he was a federal judge in that time.

## **Chapter 06 – 9:50**

### **University of Pittsburgh**

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**John Erling (JE):** Okay; as you come out of Booker T Washington, you have some hopes and dreams.

**Julius Pegues (JP):** Right.

**JE:** You wanted to be an engineer.

**JP:** That's right.

**JE:** And you wanted to attend an Oklahoma college.

**JP:** Right. Could not —

**JE:** Any one of them? Which?

**JP:** Any one. TU had an engineering school; OU had an engineering school. Langston did not have an engineering school.

**JE:** So those schools you tried to enter?

**JP:** No; nope. I didn't try to enter, because I know I wasn't gonna get in.

**JE:** At that time.

**JP:** At that time.

**JE:** No blacks attended those schools...

**JP:** ...Attended those schools —

**JE:** At all.

**JP:** None. So the first year out of high school, my aunt in Detroit, Michigan had to have surgery. She had to have the nerves tied in her back for hypertension. So I was the chosen one to go and be with her and that's what I did. So I didn't go to college right out of high school.

**JE:** Okay.

**JP:** I went to Detroit and I took postgraduate high school courses at Cass Technical High School and then I took a couple of courses each semester at Wayne State University, in preparation of going to college the following year. I had met a young, white oilman by the name of E. Alex Phillips, who is from West Virginia and knew about the University of Pittsburgh, knew about Carnegie Tech, which is now Carnegie Mellon.

He knew that they had these really good scholarships but they were very competitive. So I tried to get one of these scholarships to Carnegie Mellon, but I didn't score high enough on one of the tests, I was above 90, but I was less than 95. The competition is so stiff. These are scholarships that

you get room, board, books, and fees, and a monthly stipend. In the ranking of those people for the scholarships, I didn't get into the number. So, the following summer after I had stayed with my aunt for almost a year, I came back to Tulsa.

Alex called me one day and I went down to his office. He said, "Jules, I'll tell you what we're gonna do!" He said, "I'm gonna call a friend of mine, Captain Tom at the University of Pittsburgh."

Now, Alex Phillips was a fighter pilot in the Navy during World War II. He flew off of the aircraft carrier, Enterprise, that was commanded by Tom Hamilton, who subsequently became the athletic director at the University of Pittsburgh.

Now, the reason that they know each other so well is that Alex sank the biggest Japanese carrier afloat during World War II. But when he went back to the aircraft carrier, he flew over the deck upside down and Captain Tom was gonna court martial him, because that's a no-no, but he didn't do it, okay? (Chuckling)

So they knew each other and Alex had gone to school at the University of Pittsburgh earlier, he was in some Navy flying program. But, anyway, Alex picked up the phone and dialed his number and he said, "Captain Tom, this is Alex."

He says, "Oh, Alex! How are you doing?"

You know, he says, "Well, Captain Tom, I'll tell you what, I'm going to send you a basketball player."

Captain Tom says, "We don't have any scholarships."

Alex says, "Don't worry; I'm gonna pay everything he has to pay for the first semester and after the first games you will find a scholarship."

So I took off for the University of Pittsburgh.

**JE:** Now Alex had seen you play basketball.

**JP:** In high school.

**JE:** Did you set some records in Booker T?

**JP:** Oh, we were undefeated. We were 30-0.

**JE:** Do you know if personally you set any records?

**JP:** I didn't set any records because we played as a team.

**JE:** Other players on that Booker T team must have been very good. Did they go on to other schools as basketball players?

**JP:** Yeah. Clarence Dixon went to Langston University; Truman Williams went to Idaho Tech; Nathaniel Jones went to junior college in California. Eugene Hooks went to Lincoln University; Jerry Edwards went to the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff; Arthur McIntyre eventually got his degree from TU and served in the U. S. Air Force for 35 years. Those were my teammates.

**JE:** Okay, so you go to the University of Pittsburgh and you were the first black —

**JP:** First black basketball player at the University of Pittsburgh.

**JE:** Alright, so you walk into that locker room where you get introduced to them, how are you accepted by these?

**JP:** How was I accepted?

**JE:** Yeah.

**JP:** I was accepted very well — because I was probably the best player out there. (Chuckling)

**JE:** But you had to prove that on the floor; at first they were cold, probably, to you or indifferent?

**JP:** No.

**JE:** No.

**JP:** No. They were not cold and they were not indifferent. As a matter of fact, Chuck Hirsch, who ended up being one of the captains with me — he was a freshman out of Irwin, Pennsylvania. Chuck Hirsch came over the first day of practice. He said, “Julius, you know I don't like losing.”

I said, “Well, you know, I haven't lost too many games during my playing days.”

He said, “Well, how many games did you all lose?”

And I said, “Maybe ... three we might have lost four. In three years.”  
(Chuckling)

**JE:** So that was good enough for him.

**JP:** That was good enough. That's good enough.

**JE:** It didn't take you long then to put the ball on the floor?

**JP:** No. No; they had never seen anyone throw a baseball past the length of the court — on the basketball court — throw the basketball just like you throw the baseball.

**JE:** Just like you did.

**JP:** And just throw it right on target.

**JE:** Was the school segregated? Since you were the first — and why were you the first?

**JP:** Because they just never had any black basketball players.

**JE:** Nobody came on and tried to come on.



**JP:** There was a guy who came out for the team, before I got there, but he didn't stay. This was a year or so before I did. But he just came out to one or two practices and then went on about his business. I was there to stay.

**JE:** The first week, they knew they had a ball player.

**JP:** Oh yeah, yeah; because after the first three games, I was averaging about 25 points a ballgame.

**JE:** And the student body must have ...

**JP:** Oh, the student body loved it.

**JE:** They embraced you too, right away?

**JP:** Yeah. I did not have any problem. I love the University of Pittsburgh.

**JE:** Were there blacks attending the University of Pittsburgh?

**JP:** Oh yeah, a whole lot of 'em.

**JE:** Okay.

**JP:** We had a world-class 100m guy. We had Arnie Thurl who was a middle distance runner, Robert Greer — Bob Greer was the fullback on the University of Pittsburgh's football team. He was the first black to play in the Sugar Bowl. Now the first black to be a quarterback at a college was Henry Ford for the University of Pittsburgh.

**JE:** It didn't take them long then to probably say, "You know what, Jules," as they call you, "you've earned a scholarship."

**JP:** Right. That's right. After the third game, Captain Tom called me in; he said, "We got a scholarship for you."

**JE:** And you were averaging how many points a game?

**JP:** About 25.

**JE:** But you did set records there. You reached 1000 points.

**JP:** When I graduated from the University of Pittsburgh, I was the fourth highest scorer in the University of Pittsburgh history.

**JE:** What colleges are you playing at that time?

**JP:** We played West Virginia; we played Temple; we played St John's; we played Penn State; we played Michigan; we played Michigan State; we played Duke at Duke.

**JE:** Did you beat 'em?

**JP:** No. We played Notre Dame.

**JE:** What kind of a win-loss record did you guys have?

**JP:** Back then, freshmen couldn't play varsity, okay? And we were 15-1 as a freshman team. West Virginia beat us by one point in West Virginia. And we cleaned their clock in Pittsburgh. And then, as a sophomore, I think we were like 15 and 10. That was the first winning record that the University of Pittsburgh had had in like, I don't know, 18 years or so. Something like that. Since 1935. And then, as a junior, we were 20 and something and then we won 20 games again.

We went to the NCAA Tournament twice when they had 32 teams.

**JE:** So we're talking...

**JP:** 57, 58 — both of those years.

**JE:** And the other colleges, which are well known names, they had blacks playing on their teams too, so this was just the first for University of Pittsburgh.

**JP:** Right. University of Pittsburgh hadn't been to an NCAA Tournament, I guess, since 1935. Something. 35? It had been a long time.

**JE:** But since you arrived...

**JP:** It got better. Yeah, it got better.

**JE:** Any thoughts of playing beyond college?

**JP:** Oh yeah, I was drafted by the St. Louis Hawks.

## **Chapter 07 – 3:55**

### **Meteorologist**

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**Julius Pegues (JP):** I was in the Air Force ROTC and they were not supposed to call me in the service for, like, three years. They called me in the month after I graduated and sent me to meteorology school. I'm a weather forecaster also.

**John Erling (JE):** And I want to get to that. But while you're playing college ball in 57-8, President Eisenhower signing the Civil Rights Act of 1957. In that time we saw the integration of Little Rock Central High School. I guess that was something you knew was happening. In the meantime, you had your own work to do and you were doing your own thing.

**JP:** Right. I was well aware of all of that taking place, all of that. I was well aware of Brown versus the Board of Education because one of the primary individuals that was supplying the information and doing the research for that case was John Hope Franklin. And John Hope Franklin is from my high school. So I knew all about his participation in that case. And one of the other attorneys in that Brown versus the Board of Education lawsuit was from the University of Pittsburgh.

**JE:** You go on then to further training and you go in the military and you become a meteorologist.

**JP:** Right. I went to the St Louis University's Graduate School of Meteorology for one year from seven o'clock in the morning to five o'clock in the

evening, five days a week for one solid year. But they wouldn't let us stay and get a master's degree because all we had to write was a dissertation, because I was right up at the top of the class. And we tried to get them to let us just stay another semester and do a dissertation, but they sent us on the active duty.

**JE:** And where did you go on active duty?

**JP:** State Air Force base Nevada.

**JE:** Anything memorable there as a weather forecaster?

**JP:** Oh yeah, we had the best forecasting detachment in the fourth weather wing.

**JE:** That would have been in the sixties, early sixties.

**JP:** Yeah; 61 and 62. I was discharged from the Air Force on the 8th of August, 1962.

**JE:** Your weather forecast was for what areas?

**JP:** From Seattle, Washington down to San Diego, which included Washington, Oregon, California, Arizona, Utah, Idaho, and Montana.

**JE:** You left the service in what year?

**JP:** 8th of August, 1962.

**JE:** Before Vietnam started heating up, or it was just beginning to heat up in there.

**JP:** It was beginning to...

**JE:** ... the beginning.

**JP:** it was when they had the Bay of Pigs over in Cuba, you remember?

**JE:** Yes.

**JP:** I was in the service.

**JE:** But had nothing to do with...?

**JP:** Nothing to do with that.

**JE:** Forecasting for the Bay of Pigs.

**JP:** Mmm-mm. No.

**JE:** They aborted the Bay of Pigs.

**JP:** That's right.

**JE:** Right out of the service, you eventually came back to Tulsa.

**JP:** Right. See, before I went in the service I was a full-time employee of the Douglas Aircraft Company. So, when I got out of the service, I returned to my job at the Douglas Aircraft Company. And then the Douglas Aircraft Company didn't merge with McDonnell until 67. Then they became the McDonnell Douglas Corporation. I had a total of 31 years with the Douglas Aircraft Company and McDonnell Douglas.

**JE:** American Airlines — did you work for them?

**JP:** I worked for them for 10 years almost after I had retired from McDonnell Douglas Corporation.

**JE:** And as of this date, February 24th, 2010, you're working for ...?

**JP:** I work on behalf of the FAA as one of their designated engineering representatives for structures and I have been a designated engineering representative for the FAA since 1997.

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**Chapter 08 – 7:00**  
**Activist**

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**John Erling (JE):** While living here, you became active in your community and you became active in human rights, equal education issues in our community.

**Julius Pegues (JP):** That's right.

**JE:** What drew you into that? And tell us a little bit about that.

**JP:** Well, when I returned home it was during the time that they were moving with all deliberate speed and just nothing was taking place with respect to integration and desegregation.

I started out, I was working on the fact that I knew what had happened with our high school with respect to the gymnasium and the swimming pool. The gymnasium was really too small. I thought that we should have a larger facility in order to accommodate the fans that go to Booker T Washington's basketball games.

So in 1966 or so I went to the school board and told them "We need a new field house." They were gonna build a new field house, larger with a swimming pool, and at the last minute they dropped the swimming pool because there was no place for the kids to have a swimming meet. They just had a teaching pool.

So they built the new field house; that worked out good. And then I started working with the Target Area Action Group. The U. S. Government came up with this Model Cities program. The Model Cities program had a requirement that you have citizens' participation. So for Tulsa's Model Cities program, we had a group called the Target Area Action Group. I became the president of the Target Area Action Group and I think I was the president about three times. But during that time Booker T was still playing its games at Carver Stadium.

Everybody else is playing in larger stadiums. They had a game with

Memorial and Memorial didn't want to come over to what we called the snake pit. That's the Caver Stadium. Okay?

**JE:** In 60...

**JP:** 67, 68 something. They had a pretty good team.

**JE:** But they wouldn't come over here and play.

**JP:** They didn't want to come. But I told Ed Lacy, "Hey! They are coming."

**JE:** Ed Lacy was the athletic director.

**JP:** He was the coach of Booker T and the athletic director at Booker T also.

So, there I told 'em: "Well, you all can forfeit the game. You want to forfeit? That's fine. Then we'll move on."

But they decided to come and play. We had fans hanging from the rafters. They were all around the track. Both stands were full, both sides, and they were all around the track. Not one incident.

**JE:** Would this have been one of the first white-black ...?

**JP:** Oh, no. Oh, no. They had been coming over.

**JE:** It was just a big deal with Memorial —

**JP:** Memorial. Right. Yeah. They decided that they didn't want to play on the North side: "It's too dangerous."

**JE:** Yeah, But they did come anyway.

**JE:** Yeah, they came.

**JE:** No incidents?

**JP:** No incidents, no incidents.

**JE:** And who won the game?

**JE:** Booker T. (Chuckling) Yeah, see, during that stretch I coached the junior high team at Marian Anderson. I had players like Bo Tiger and I had Reuben Gant and I had John Winesbury, they all played on my basketball team. But you couldn't play unless you had good grades.

When I was in junior high school, Art Williams was my coach. We had to get our teachers to sign an incidental cord on Fridays in order for us to play the next week.

**JE:** Proving that you have the grades...

**JP:** Grades and attendance. And if you didn't, you did not play. So we learned, early on, that the most important thing was education because Art Williams Sr. would not let you play unless you had good grades. And you could not have a mark on your record for attitude.

**JE:** What about Reuben Gant? Did he always have the —

**JP:** Oh, always, always, always. Although I did prevent them from playing in the game because they hadn't turned in their work to Mrs. Hopkins, Reuben Gant, John Winesbury, Daniels, Clinton Ball, and another player, they just didn't get to play.

And they thought they could entice me to let me, but no.

“When you turn your work in, and it's satisfactory, you can play. Until that time, no.”

**JE:** Did you ever remind Reuben of that?

**JP:** Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. And he laughed. He laughed. He told somebody, he said “Don't pay any attention to that smile Mr. Pegues has on his face 'cause he he gets pretty serious about education.”

But anyway, we got the stadium built out there at Booker T. See, the Tulsa



public schools didn't pay for the stadium at Booker, they didn't have any money — they said. So we went to Washington D.C. and got the Model Cities people — got HUD to approve the city of Tulsa using \$600,000 of Model Cities money to build the stadium, predicated on the fact that the money from the concessions would fund the junior high athletic program. And I did it for years.

**JE:** Did that work? That model?

**JP:** With the concession stand, we bought uniforms, balls, footballs, basketballs, track uniforms, whatever they needed, we bought it. We bought it from concession monies. That's why the government allowed us to build that stadium. Then the Tulsa public school system tried to get some of the concession money and I refused to give it to them. I said, "This isn't a stadium that you built. This isn't a stadium that you even wanted!" Okay? "And all of the money that's made in these concession stands will be used for the poor kids in this area."

And that's what we did. I don't know whether they're giving them money now or not.

**JE:** But that's the way it was set up. That was the way you got the money from the federal government.

**JP:** That's exactly how we got it. And that's the only reason that the federal government let us build that stadium is because we convinced them that we could generate the monies for the junior high kids with those concession monies. We didn't build a stadium until in the 70s.

**JE:** Tulsa Public Schools thinks they have some right to come over and ask for those concessions.

**JP:** In the 80s they thought they could —

**JE:** So they forgot history.

**JE:** Oh, they always do.

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**Chapter 09 – 13:48**  
**School Integration**

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**Julius Pegues (JP):** We desegregated the Tulsa Public School system.

**John Erling (JE):** “We.” Okay, tell us about that.

**JP:** Okay. There was a group of white parents who wanted their children to go to an environment where there was a mixed group. So we started the Burroughs Little School right over on Cincinnati. That was running good. The Tulsa Public School system was providing the transportation. Kids would come over the Burroughs Little School, study, and go to class together, and it was working good. Nancy McDonald was one of the leaders. Betsy Horowitz was another one of the leaders. Mrs. Brown was another one of the leaders, okay?

**JE:** So whites and blacks went to Burroughs —

**JP:** Burroughs Little School, right.

**JE:** Was that the first?

**JP:** Now, I don't know if that was the first integrated school, but that was our first foray into integration and desegregation of the schools.

Then we set up another program at Emerson and all of these kids, white and black, that left the sixth grade in Emerson, they went to Carver; they left Burroughs and they went to Carver.

**JE:** So now you've got whites and blacks in Carver.

**JP:** Right. But you see now the Tulsa Public Schools, the only thing they were doing was providing the transportation.

**JE:** Mm-hmm.

**JP:** All right? That's running real good; then in 1985 they decided that they couldn't provide the transportation any longer. And so the program, what?

**JE:** Down the tube.

**JP:** Went down the tube; because the parents depended on the transportation. Now, if the government has told you you have to do something with your schools and you got some parents out there volunteering to do it. And then you cut the legs out from them by taking the money away from the transportation. Nancy McDonald used to do all of the routes to pick up the kids by herself. Tulsa Public Schools didn't do any routes Nancy McDonald did all of that by herself.

She plotted all of the routes to pick up the white kids to bring them over to black schools.

**JE:** But then they took the buses away.

**JP:** They took the buses away, said, "We aren't going to provide transportation for your kids." Well they weren't for the white kids but they're bussing the black kids all over town. (Laughing) And now they don't even want to do that. They're talking about buying 80 buses. (Laughing)

But anyway, we have had some good people doing some good things, but the people, it seemed like who were responsible, you know, who were the responsible parties, when they decided to kill the programs, they just killed them.

**JE:** Here we are in 2010. We still have a racial discrimination problem on our hands.

**JP:** That's right.

**JE:** And we thought that when Martin Luther King had a dream in the sixties and the seventies and now you're still talking about it to this very day. There will be students listening to our words — 2050, 2075 — will they say

“Yeah, we still have it.” Is this ingrained in us by nature? Or will it get better? It is better today, we have to say that.

**JP:** It is better. It is better today than it was yesterday. It'll be better tomorrow than it is today. There is no magic solution to this problem. But if we continue to talk about it and work on it one day, we'll solve it. We won't solve it to everyone's satisfaction. But we will solve it to the majority of the people's satisfaction. And that will make it a lot better place to live for everybody.

**JE:** In 2010, it's a lot better for blacks in America than it was in the 1950s. So we have made that kind of progress. But if you take a survey of whites, they think racial discrimination, I mean, look it: we're commingling, we're going to colleges and all that. And I guess they don't sense that we still have a racial problem to this day.

**JP:** That is true.

**JE:** And is that one of the problems facing the black community that you haven't been able to keep that issue in forefront?

**JP:** That's right. That's one of the problems. And that's why we're building this John Hope Franklin Center for Reconciliation, where people can come together and dialogue about race. I mean, we have a lot of differences, but we have more things in common than we have differences. Once we come together, and talk about the things that we have in common, it will diminish the things that are different among us.

**JE:** Right.

**JP:** But if you don't talk about it, if you don't talk about it, you aren't going to move towards a solution. It takes dialogue. It takes people coming together to see what the other person's viewpoint is, see? Some people just don't want to face reality. Period.

**JE:** Is it true that if you were to go to Booker T Washington today and you went into the lunch room at noontime, that there'd be self-segregation going on?

**JP:** Right.

**JE:** Whites here, black there.

**JP:** Mm-hmm. (In agreement)

**JE:** What's going on there?

**JP:** Well, that's because they don't talk to one another and there is no one that is facilitating the communication amongst the groups.

**JE:** Whites will say, "Well, we all sit down here, but the blacks go over there." So how are we going to get them together at lunch? They feel more comfortable amongst their own. I mean, doesn't that kind of make sense, that if there were a group of Asians here and whatever here, that we tend to be with those that we feel more familiar with, right?

**JP:** Right.

**JE:** So maybe we have that going on.

**JP:** Right. And I think it's a matter of people feeling comfortable with each other, but I feel like someday that will be overcome, but you have got to have a facilitator in some way to move these students toward that goal.

You can go to college and what happens? Everybody is co-mingling with one another, talking to one another, having lunch together. But at the high school level? It really starts earlier than the high school level. And when you take the situation that we have here, in the Tulsa Public School system, back when they were integrating and desegregating the only students that were forcibly bussed were the black students. The only students, okay? Now when Booker T was first desegregated, all the white kids came voluntarily and all the students who lived in the Booker T attendance zone went to Booker T — no qualifications, no nothing.

Then someone got the happy idea that you have to have qualifications. I think that set up a barrier right there. Out at Edison, right now. Edison is a

magnet school. Every child living in the Edison district has the right to go to Edison — no qualifications, no nothing. Over at Booker T, that's not the case.

So, we discriminate and then we try to justify discriminating after they had more than enough volunteers, you know, whites from the south side and it was a beautiful thing, okay? Coming to Booker T and they went to this qualification thing, they set up non-contiguous zones in the Booker T area so you were forcibly bussed from your area out to these other schools that they assigned you to. It didn't matter that you didn't want to go there. And that was wrong. And it's still wrong and they're still trying to justify, they want to say that everybody has to qualify to go to Booker T. It shouldn't be like that because for a black child, these educators don't know what they're gonna do. They don't know the ones that are gonna be successful. So a lot of black children are motivated in their latter years, they might not catch fire till they get to be juniors or seniors.

But then when you separate them from something they wanted to do and they live right across the street from Booker T and then you tell them, "You can't go because you don't qualify."

Now there's something wrong with that picture when, in the Edison district, all you gotta do is go to school.

**JE:** Because that's a largely white district.

**JP:** Right.

**JE:** In the Edison district.

**JE:** Right. And they don't want black kids out there. Keep that in mind, now. They don't want — they really don't want black kids out there at Edison. They're trying to figure out how to get rid of them period. But they can't. You could take all of the students who live in the Booker T attendance area, and they could go to Booker T because there's less than 500, and you still have enough seats for 750 white kids. It's just that we continue to create discriminatory situations for children and we need to get rid of that.

**JE:** That's interesting because Booker T, as a magnet, there are whites who are clamoring to attend Booker T Washington.

**JP:** Right.

**JE:** There is a line and if you can get some influence from somebody to jump ahead, you'll get your kid in and it's highly respected in our town.

**JP:** Right. That's right.

**JE:** It's one of the most respected schools that we have in our town.

**JP:** Yeah. And what we're saying is because the neighborhood child is going there, that's not going to diminish the quality of the school. We've always had a good school when we were all black, all the black children went. Some kids become seniors, man, they take off. I mean we've got more people with PhDs and MDs then you can shake a stick at.

Seriously, seriously — I can start rattling you off names, you know what I mean? But there's something wrong with that picture.

**JE:** Real discrimination in this day. So then are they saying “The curriculum is of such a high standard that we do not believe the children who live in the neighborhoods are going to be able to sustain that”?

**JP:** But over Edison, those kids over the Edison can take all the AP courses and any other courses that they have without being in that magnet program. But the kids in the magnet program, the only courses they can take are those advanced courses in the AP courses and those types of courses. They have to take all magnet courses.

**JE:** So you could have kids coming into Booker T now and say, “Well, they don't qualify for this magnet program,” at least they're in our school and maybe they'll get into the magnet program.

**JP:** That's all we're saying. That's all we're saying, John, you understand what I'm saying?

**JE:** I do.

**JP:** That's all we're saying. See, students motivate other students. But if he's disgruntled, way out here at East Central — you got a problem on your hand cause he's gonna be disgruntled until he either drops out or he finishes.

That's all we're saying.

And we want to give him the maximum opportunity. So if you're accepted at Booker T after these 500 neighborhood kids are in there and you're accepted in one of these 700 slots that are left, you have to be in the magnet and you have to take all magnet courses because you qualify.

And you say that you can make it in this special program having what they call a whole school as a magnet school and not allowing the neighborhood kids to go to their own neighborhood schools. When you continually say that our concept in the TPS school system is neighborhood schools.

**JE:** I would imagine there are students from the neighborhood of Booker T who have qualified to be in the magnet program.

**JP:** Oh, yeah.

**JE:** It's not like we're leaving them all out, so they're there, some of them.

**JP:** They will make an application to be in the magnet school.

**JE:** And they qualify, so there are blacks in the neighborhood attending.

**JP:** Right.

**JE:** Your issue is the majority of them do not get in.

**JP:** Right, because they accept all these other students before they're even considered.

**JE:** Here, we're having this discussion in 2010.



**JP:** —10, (Chuckling) It's a necessary discussion.

**JE:** Does it blow your mind?

**JP:** Yeah. Yeah. But if you and I don't talk about it...

**JE:** Students are gonna listen to it. This is what we want.

**JP:** Right.

## **Chapter 10 – 6:00**

### **Henry Bellmon**

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**John Erling (JE):** Henry Bellmon back in the 60s was governor, I believe, when bussing came in.

**Julius Pegues (JP):** Right.

**JE:** And isn't it true that he led the way on bussing in Oklahoma?

**JP:** That's right. He says it's all a matter of which way you're sitting in the buses.  
(Chuckling)

Henry said we've been bussing kids for years. How many miles you wanna bus them? We go out on the country road and pick them up there on the bus. So there's nothing wrong with bussing.

**JE:** Right. Did you agree with bussing at that time that that was important?

**JP:** Yeah, yeah.

**JE:** So, the fact that you had a governor who took the lead, it could have been somebody who shied away from that. But it's an honor to—

**JP:** He stood tall, I'm telling you he stood tall on integration and desegregation. He didn't even blink.

**JE:** He was governor when the Civil Rights Act in 64 and 65 voting rights act. And I did interview him and as I recall, he went to various parts of our state and said "Now we don't want to have any problems here."

**JP:** Right.

**JE:** And he kept everybody calm.

**JE:** Right. So your leadership comes from the top.

**JE:** Here's a leader, Clara Luper. As you know, she was known for her sit-in movements in Oklahoma City in 1958.

**JP:** Right.

**JE:** And the nonviolent sit-ins at the drug store lunch counters and it overturned that policy of segregation. Were you aware of her?

**JP:** Yes, I was aware of her and she epitomized the nonviolent solution to the problems that we have with these segregated facilities and she was an excellent leader, whatever they were doing. Clara Luper was in control. She knew how to handle children and adults and that's what made her good at what she did. Yeah, I thought she was very effective in what she did.

**JE:** And it started out in a very simple deal. You've served on many boards, served on the boards of Tulsa, NAACP, Tulsa Urban League, Tulsa Housing Authority.

**JP:** Okay. I was on the Tulsa Airport Authority and the Tulsa Airport Improvement Trust. As a matter of fact, I was the chairperson of the Tulsa Airport Improvement Trust and the Tulsa Airport Authority. I served on both of those same people, served on both of them. And now I'm the chairperson of the Tulsa Development Authority.

**JE:** Somewhere in your life, you had to meet a partner.

**JP:** My wife of over 50 years is from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

**JE:** And you met her there?

**JP:** She is Dr. Wynette Pegues. She has a master's degree and EDD from the University of Tulsa and a professional counseling degree. But I met her in Pittsburgh. She was a student at a college down the street from the University of Pittsburgh called Mount Mercy College. Mount Mercy is about a mile and a half from the University of Pittsburgh.

She graduated from Mount Mercy in 1958 and she was one of two black students going to school there.

**JE:** Where did you meet?

**JP:** One of her friends one night was having a birthday party and her friend asked her if she wanted to ride down and pick up another friend of hers, which was me. Well when they got down to where I live, a friend of mine from Penn State had come over to where I lived and we were sitting across the street in her car looking at them when they pulled up. Subsequently I had my friend from Penn State drop me off at her house. My wife was there and that's where I met her, I met her at her friend's house at a birthday party. We've been married for over 50 years, we're on our 52nd year now and we have three children.

Mary is our oldest daughter. She was born in 1960. She has a bachelor's degree and a master's degree from Washington University in St. Louis. She currently works for a law firm in Dallas. She has two years of law school at Cal Berkeley, she did research at the VA Hospital in Oakland, California for quite a while, but now she's come back to Dallas. She's working for this law firm.

Now, my next oldest child is Michael. He graduated from SMU's engineering school; he has a degree in mechanical engineering and he graduated from Tulane law school. So he's an intellectual property lawyer in Dallas and he is a section chief at Bracewell Giuliani law firm. You know Giuliani that was running for president?

**JE:** Oh, of course.

**JP:** Well my son is the section chief in intellectual property at that law firm.

**JE:** Okay.

**JP:** And my youngest daughter has a bachelor's degree from the American College of Applied Arts and she has a Master's degree from OSU in Special Ed and Children with Learning Disabilities. She's certified in three areas and she is a manager of the children with learning disabilities Program for the Denver Public School system.

**JE:** Well, you have reason to be proud of that family.

**JP:** Yeah, I am proud of my kids.

**JE:** It would have been more difficult for them to do that back in the fifties.

**JP:** Yeah.

**JE:** So look at what they have done and what they've accomplished. So there could be a lot of people say, "Well, what's wrong?" You guys have had a discussion about race relations. It may have healed some, but there still is going on in Tulsa, look what they've done, but we still have our problems, don't we?

**JP:** Right. And we're gonna have our problems if we don't talk about them and continue to work on them.

## **Chapter 11 – 4:38**

### **Words for Students**

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**John Erling (JE):** As students listen to this and maybe they can hear it 5 years, 10 years from now — what do you say to them?

**Julius Pegues (JP):** To treat every individual like you want to be treated. That's the most important thing, is to see a person for what they are, okay? And don't prejudge people. Get to know someone, get to know them first; and don't just lump everyone into one category. Find out about a person's character and what that person is all about before you categorize them. And just have respect for your fellow man.

**JE:** Yup. And I'm thinking you're talking between whites and blacks. But you know, within the white population, and within the black, we prejudge people ourselves that we see somebody walking down the street or they're fat, "I don't want to talk to them."

**JP:** Right.

**JE:** Or somebody looks real ugly, and we don't want to talk to them. So your words are for the overall population.

**JP:** For everyone. Everyone: respect your fellow man. If we had more respect for one another, we wouldn't have half the problems that we have. But people tend to do things and then try to cover up for it, try to justify. Although they know it's wrong, they try to justify what they've done, which makes it worse instead of facing up to what they've done and developing respect for everybody.

**JE:** Looking at you and your family and they're so successful. We haven't talked about — it hasn't been easy.

**JP:** No.

**JE:** I mean, you have been discriminated against as a black man and even your children, perhaps, as blacks, haven't they?

**JP:** Yeah.

**JE:** Name calling? I don't know, but it hasn't been as easy as a white person who would have walked the same trail.

**JP:** Right. Most people don't realize that I was not the best athlete in our family. My older brother had scholarships to Big 10 schools as a quarterback. His name is Allen Pegues, Jr.

**JE:** Football was his —

**JP:** Football was his game, but he also played basketball.

**JE:** What happened to all that?

**JP:** Well, he got married, so he didn't go to college; but he was by far — he was head and shoulders athletically above all of us who went to college, see?

I went to the University of Pittsburgh and played basketball and I'm in the University of Pittsburgh's Hall of Honor.

Now, my next younger brother, Sam Pegues, he went to school at Oklahoma State. He ran track for Ralph Higgins, he was the Big 8 high jump champ and he's in Oklahoma State's Hall of Fame.

Now my youngest brother, Luther, he went to Arizona first came back to Easton and ended up at the University of Central Oklahoma with his coach from Easton. He was the captain of Central State. He's in Central States's Hall of Fame.

**JE:** Wow. We both have brothers named Luther.

**JP:** Oh, do you? (Chuckling) My younger brother Luther, he played for University of Central Oklahoma and he coached McLain out there for, I don't know how many years he coached the girls for, I don't know, 10 years or so. And then he coached the boys for 15 years or so. Oh, and he's in the Oklahoma Coaches Hall of Fame.

**JE:** Henry Iba, when he was over here at OSU coaching — does that cover the span when you were playing basketball at Pittsburgh, doesn't it?

**JP:** Yeah.

**JE:** And here, maybe you could have been in Oklahoma playing for that legendary coach yourself.

**JP:** That's right.

**JE:** But at the time they didn't allow blacks to play.

**JP:** That's right. That is exactly right. It didn't bother me then. I played for the University of Pittsburgh.

**JE:** It was their loss.

**JP:** Right. And we tried to get a game down here, but you know, we never did. The closest game we could get to Tulsa was with St Louis University in St Louis. And that was the only game that my mother saw me play. My brother and my cousin brought her up to St. Louis to see me play. She saw me play one college game.

**JE:** I gotta say thank you for our time here today, this is very interesting.

**JP:** Oh, I'm enjoying it.

**JE:** I appreciated your openness and forthrightness and I think it's gonna be very valuable as people hear about it.

**JP:** Yeah.

## **Chapter 12 – 10:31**

### **Accountability**

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**Julius Pegues (JP):** You know, I think that our process with the Tulsa public school system would be much further along if they would just listen to the citizens — just listen to the people.

In the 70s. We had such a great start. Citizens didn't tear down. The

educators tore it down. We had training for teachers on ethnic diversity, you know what I mean? Just teaching them to cope with classrooms of kids with different backgrounds, different colors, language, you know what I mean, and how to control all of that.

We had it going on and I'm telling you, I am thoroughly disappointed with the Tulsa public school system for undermining all of that effort. That's the thing that hurts me the most is that we had such a tremendous thought. HJ Green was the first white principal of Booker T Washington High School. We had a reception on a Sunday for him. Sunday morning, it was pouring down, pouring down. The reception was supposed to start at 2. 1 o'clock, it stopped raining — fun game out. Everybody had a beautiful day. That's a true story.

**John Erling (JE):** (Chuckling)

**JP:** We had 500 people up in there for a reception for the new principal. We got to welcome you in here because you have to continue the tradition of Booker T Washington High School. See, Booker T's tradition is academic excellence. The first school to be accredited in Tulsa, Oklahoma was Booker T Washington High School.

**JE:** Ahead of Tulsa Central?

**JP:** Hello! (Chuckling)

**JE:** Wow.

**JP:** We have a long history; and to tell you the truth, our community is getting fed up with this mediocre education that's being provided for the kids in North Tulsa? We are getting fed up. That is not what we're all about. We have a long history of academic excellence.

**JE:** But if you say you get fed up, what can you do with that being fed up?

**JP:** Well, I guess we're going to have to address the Tulsa public school system. That's what we're gonna have to do. They are not focused in on the job that they're supposed to be doing.



**JE:** Are you saying they're inferior teachers in North Tulsa?

**JP:** That's what I'm talking about. That's exactly what I'm talking about. And they're getting rid of a lot of good black educators; and it's showing.

**JE:** And it's a big deal for a white to take an assignment in North Tulsa, isn't it?

**JP:** Right, right.

**JE:** "Ooooh. We don't want to go up there."

**JP:** That's right. That's what I'm talking about. When you ought to be — if you're a teacher — teach anywhere. But this picture would be totally different if they had just stayed on the path that we were on of preparing teachers for these challenges in the classroom that they're facing now, because they would have been prepared for it, okay? They would have been prepared for them because they had this in-service training that was mandatory for the teachers to attend and we would be much further ahead in this game than we are now; and we're gonna have to do something about that. We really are.

**JE:** Doesn't it just seem bigger than Dallas? How can you change that? How do you reverse this trend?

**JP:** They have got to get somebody on top that is truly interested in educating kids. See, talk is cheap. When I told you that I kept Reuben Gant and John Winesbury the Rose Bowl star, you know what I mean and everything, you know what I mean? When I didn't let them play they knew I was serious about education. I was just as serious as a heart attack. And they turn in their lessons all the way through high school. I'm telling you; I didn't have any more problems out of them.

Miss Juanita Hopkins, who's the best English teacher in town, called me and said, "Mr. Pegues, your star athletes — they haven't turned my work in."

"They what?!"

"They haven't turned my work in."

I said, "You've got to be kidding me."

She says, "Oh, no."

I told her, "Don't worry. I'll take care of 'em."

They came to practice and I said, "Everybody turned their work in? Turning in their English assignments? Do we have a problem developing here?"

"Oh, no problem, Mr. Pegues. No problem."

"Oh, okay. Fine."

Saturday, we had to play a game. I called Miss Hopkins. I said, "Miss Hopkins, you have your work yet?"

She said, "No."

I said, "Well, did they say anything?"

"No."

I said, "Okay. That's all I need to know. They come out there for the warmup. We're playing blue teal over here Clinton. They come out there, they're warming up you know because they did have a good team.

So, game's about to start and everybody come to the sideline, you know, and I name the starters. So, I said, "You, you, you, you, and you: get your stuff off." And they all look. My little second team, you know, they surprised me! They were playing pretty good, you know what I mean? We're hanging in there! We were within two or three points, you know. Halftime, Winesbury, he's stomping around again. He's looking at me.

"Back up off of me, boy. Don't stand that close to me."

He said, "Mr. Pegues, you don't got —"

"No... Did you turn your work in? Did you have your English assignment? Did you turn it in?"

"No, no, no, no."

I said, "I'll tell you what: the next time you're gonna play is when Miss Hopkins calls me and tells me you have turned in all of your assignments, and all of you got B+ or better! Now that's when you're gonna play. So, if you want to go home now, you go home now. If you want to stay with me and not make yourself look bad, that's fine. That's all right. Okay? But you will not be playing in this game."

We had a game the next Wednesday. Miss Hopkins called me Wednesday morning, said, "Mr. Pegues, what did you do?"

I said, "I didn't do anything, Miss Hopkins. You know me. I didn't do anything; but if you're gonna play for my team, you're gonna perform in the classroom."

She said, "Well, boy, they come in, they turn in all their papers in and everything. They even turned in a couple of back assignments."

I said, "Oh, you got to be kidding me! Yeah!"

She said, "I'll let you know if anything else comes up."

That night, we go out, and I really pull a fast one on 'em. Because they all think they're gonna play, you know what I mean? So, I said, "You, you, you, you, and you start."

Boy, they stomp their feet. So I said, "Hey. Does somebody have a problem here? I looked again: "You got a problem?" I said, "Now just sit down; just sit down."

And so I let my kids in my second team play the first quarter and then I let

them play, you know? (Laughing) I didn't have no more problems with them all the way through high school.

**JE:** So you were coaching...

**JP:** Junior high at Marian Anderson.

**JE:** Marian Anderson.

**JP:** 7th, 8th and 9th grade.

**JE:** You coached that.

**JP:** I coached all three teams by myself. And you wanna know why I coach them by myself?

**JE:** Why?

**JP:** Because a lot of these coaches think they playing in the NBA. And I'm teaching skills. I can run three teams at one time; and we're only gonna practice one hour. That's all. Because that's all you need to practice and that's all we practiced was one hour. I practiced 7th, 8th and 9th grade at the same time.

**JE:** Wow.

**JP:** I never had any problem.

**JE:** Was that your full-time job?

**JP:** Oh, no. Oh, no. My full-time job, I worked for Douglas Aircraft. Yeah; it's all about being organized and having people paying attention to what you're doing. You don't need to practice. These people go out and practice two and three hours at a time for what? Go home and study. You know, if you played for me, you won't ever be able to say that you didn't have enough time to get your lesson because you're only gonna be here for one hour. And if I call your house 30 minutes after practice is over and you're not home, you better be prepared to tell me where you were.

**JE:** You went into that story because we need to be holding these kids accountable.

**JP:** Right. That's right. You got to hold them accountable. You see, playing a basketball game and a football game isn't the most important thing in life.

**JE:** What you're talking about affects whites, blacks...

**JP:** Everybody.

**JE:** Every school we all know about stories about how they are forgiven and work is done for them...

**JP:** And all that. It doesn't make sense.

**JE:** Right.

**JP:** Every tub is sitting on its own bottom.

**JE:** (Laughing) Right.

**JP:** Every tub sitting on its own bottom, okay? And you are accountable for you. I used to tell them, "I look at life like this: 'If it is to be, it's up to me,' and you need to do the same thing." Yeah. Ronnie Daniels. He's a lawyer over there. Reuben Gant runs the Greenwood Chamber. Now, John Winesbury, he graduated from Stanford, worked at a couple of jobs and came home, and then he went to law school at Washington University in St. Louis; graduated from law school, but then he went to Egypt to study Arabic and picked up some kind of bug and within two years after he got back, he was dead.

**JE:** Mmm. But you know, you may have caught the attention of these young men there in junior high school. That propelled them onto these positions that you've just talked about. Right there.

**JP:** That's right.

**JE:** Yeah.

### **Chapter 13 – 8:00 Land for Education**

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**John Erling (JE):** If there's anything that you're scanning your brain about, if you'd like to be saying...

**Julius Pegues (JP):** Oh, yeah, well you were asking me about my wife. Now, my wife is the one who started higher ed for the state of Oklahoma here in the city.

**JE:** Explain that.

**JP:** They had a consortium when there was no state-sponsored higher education in the city of Tulsa. They hired my wife to start state-sponsored higher education. They hired her on July the 1st and, when she opened school, at the end of August, they had 1800 students. And she was having classes all over the city of Tulsa. OU had classes. OSU had classes. Langston had classes; and Northeastern was teaching classes. She coordinated all of that.

**JE:** And that was the birth of?

**JP:** OSU.

**JE:** OSU, which campuses right behind us over here.

**JP:** That's right.

**JE:** She started that.

**JP:** She started that.

**JE:** That's been a long journey, hasn't it?

**JP:** That it has. But the other key thing in that development of that, right there, is back in the seventies with the target area action group. We set aside this land, on the land use plan, for educational purposes.

All this land where OSU is here, and across — we set that aside for educational purposes because that was the location of the old Booker T Washington High School.

**JE:** Okay.

**JP:** They said we were crazy and we told them, “We can see in the future a little bit further than you all can.” (Laughing)

**JE:** Now we've got beautiful structures over there.

**JP:** Right! And I was downtown. My wife was heading up this consortium of schools and this guy from OSU asked me about this land. And I just told him, “Oh, we set that up for educational purposes. Whoever wants to buy it from the Tulsa Development Authority, they have as much right to it as anyone; it's for educational purposes. As long as you have an educational something on that site, you'll be okay.” And the next thing I knew, OSU had gone and got them some money to build this.

**JE:** That make you feel good?

**JP:** Yeah, I just wish that my buddy Homer Johnson was here to see that, because I can remember a guy called us one day we were both down at TDA, and they made the comment that says, “You guys are off your rocker. Y'all set that land aside for educational purposes?”

I told 'em, I said, “It'll take a little time, but it'll come. And you'll see what we got going.”

**JE:** And there it is. Great.

**JP:** You just have to keep working on it. Now, this reconciliation park is going to be a point of destination also. And I don't think the legislature gets it yet

about points of destination because people are touring all of the time. Let's say I had three families per day stop over in Tulsa just to see this reconciliation park.

**JE:** That's a victory, isn't it?

**JP:** You got three meals, you got three hotel rooms probably, and then you got three tanks of gas. All left where? In Tulsa, Oklahoma.

**JE:** Right.

**JP:** See what I mean?

**JE:** And you're talking again about the John Hope Franklin...

**JP:** Reconciliation park.

**JE:** ...which is being constructed now here in 2010.

**JP:** Along with the ballpark, and if they get the art museum opened over there, that The Kaiser Foundation is doing, it's all beginning to come together. You've gotta have vision. Without the vision, You don't have anything. You gotta have vision. See, that's like when the spaghetti warehouse people came, we told them then that when spaghetti warehouse came, this whole area was going to materialize. And it has.

**JE:** You're obviously a leader. Why didn't you ever run for city council? Have you run?

**JP:** No.

**JE:** And you wouldn't do that?

**JP:** No.

**JE:** Why?



**JP:** Too many other things are important to do. That's for somebody who wants to be out there in the public eye all the time.

**JE:** Right.

**JP:** I just like to get things done. You take this Greenwood Center down here. When they wanted to do the Greenwood Center down here, they adopted the plan to do it, and they gave the contract for refurbishing the buildings to Joe Robinson, that's a black architect. He got all of his work finished and wouldn't do anything else. And Ralph McIntosh, who was the president of the Greenwood chamber then, called me at, like, 1:30 in the morning.

My phone rang and he said "Little Pig!"

I said, "Mac? Is this you?" He was an ex-policeman.

He said, "Yeah."

I said, "Now what have I done that you have to call me at 1:30 in the morning?"

He says, "Well, I was just trying to make sure that I could catch you. Joe Robinson won't do the cost estimate; we can't go any further because TDA said we gotta have a cost estimate."

And I said, "Okay. Don't call me anymore at 1:30 in the morning." So, I said, "I will go by Joe Robinson's to pick up his drawings, get 10 sets made, and take him his drawings back. And I'll get you a cost take on it."

Joe Robinson's office was in the library down there on Pine Street. He loaned me his drawings. I took him out here and got 10 copies — cost me \$100 a copy, so it's \$1000. Took him his drawings back. And I went across the river to see my buddy Bill Flynn.

**JE:** Bill Flint?

**JP:** Yeah. And that's who did the take-off. I just had to massage some numbers because he's got everything — he's got subcontractors. He got everything.

And he did it and I massaged the numbers to take out an extra amount that he had in there, because he couldn't tell his subcontractors to take it out. Took him the cost estimate, took him the drawing. They didn't give me my \$1000 back, but we got the Greenwood Section refurbished.

**JE:** Yeah; it looks nice.

**JP:** Yeah, it looks nice.

**JE:** "Julius Pegues." Is there a meaning to the name "Pegues?"

**JP:** No, except that it's French. And they were tobacco planters down in South Carolina.

**JE:** French?

**JP:** French. There's a place in South Carolina, that when they first came to the United States, they built a place down there called "Pegues Place." I've taken my kids down there and that's the origin of the Pegues name in this country. It's really "PI-GAHY."

**JE:** We pronounce it "PUH-GEESE".

**JP:** We call it. "PUH-GEESE." P-E-G-U-E-S. So my mother's roots are in South Carolina and my father's roots in South Carolina too. Although he's from Arkansas. I've enjoyed it!

**JE:** I did, too. Keep on doing your great work in the community.

**JP:** Yeah, I love this place. I love Tulsa. Guy I knew said, "Man, you're going back to Tulsa?"

"Yeah, I'm going back to Tulsa." (Laughing)

I think it's a great place. It was a great place to raise a family.

**JE:** Did you get interested in any of the Bob Wills and country swing and all that kind of thing? You didn't?

**JP:** Mmm-mm (in agreement). But, oh I know about Bob Wills and all the rest of the country and western singers.

**JE:** Other music? Blues and jazz and that kind of thing?

**JP:** Right down here on Greenwood.

**JE:** Did you see anybody who became a name?

**JP:** Earl Bostic used to live three blocks from where I lived; he was a musician, yeah.

**JE:** Some mighty good jazz right here in Greenwood, wasn't it?

**JP:** Oh yeah, they all used to come and there used to be a little place called The Flamingo that was in this area here.

**JE:** Well thank you for this time.

**JP:** You're welcome. I enjoyed it.

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