

Maxine Horner

One of the first African American women in the Oklahoma State Senate, serving from 1986 to 2004.

Chapter 01 - 1:08

Introduction

Announcer: Maxine Horner was one of the first two African American women to serve in the Oklahoma Senate. She worked for Congressman James R. Jones and became interested in politics, which prompted her to run for an open seat in 1986, and she termed out in 2004. Maxine's focus was on economic development and education. Of the many bills she sponsored, her highlight piece of legislation was the OHLAP bill known as the Oklahoma promise. She introduced the idea and saw it through to passage. Some of the students receiving the financial aid went on to serve in the Oklahoma legislature. All this from a woman who was not allowed to shop in many downtown Tulsa stores and when using public transportation was asked to move to the back of the bus. Her legislative career included serving as the first female chair of the Democratic Caucus and the chair of the Business and Labor committee. Maxine is also credited with founding the Oklahoma Jazz Hall of Fame, and she was inducted in the Oklahoma Women's Hall of Fame.

Now you can hear Maxine Horner talk about her political career, the challenges of growing up in the fifties and her son-in-law Wayman Tisdale...on the oral history website VoicesofOklahoma.com.

Chapter 02 - 5:45

Music in the Family

John Erling: My name is John Erling and today's date is November 14, 2019.

Maxine, would you state your full name, please?

Maxine Horner: Okay, I'm former state senator Maxine E. Horner. And my age is eighty-seven.

JE: And your birth date?

MH: Is 1/17/32.

JE: You know, you make me want to check your driver's license to make sure you're eighty-seven. Because you don't look eighty-seven at all.

Where are we recording this interview?

MH: We're recording this at the Greenwood Cultural Center.

JE: Where were you born?

MH: I was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

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

MH: My mother, originally from Muskogee. Her maiden name was Certain. She settled in Tulsa. She was a high school graduate of Manual Training High School in Muskogee, Oklahoma.

And I always like to boast about my mom because one of the things that happened to her when she was a senior in high school at Manual Training High School, she made her singing debut over here, which was called the Convention Hall, now the Brady Center. But beautiful voice, beautiful soloist, soprano. But opening doors wasn't available to her at that time to move forward. But she did make her debut here in Tulsa.

JE: So you—opening doors—was that because she was African American?

MH: African American. And of course, probably being in Oklahoma, doors were just not open to that type of talent at the time.

JE: No. What was her personality like?

MH: Beautiful angel. I always said that, you know, I had my angel mother on one side, and my dad was the other person on the other side, the one that always kicked butt sometimes.

JE: [laughs]

MH: But she was absolutely a beautifully spirited woman and very angelic and could just say things. It was, I guess you would say encouragement, because she could stay it all the time, I don't care, no excuses. Even coming up in a segregated community, which I lived, but those were not acceptable in terms of trying to move forward. And she always did that in a positive way.

And one of the key things for her was education, education, education.

JE: So that was planted in your head from the get-go.

MH: Very early.

JE: Right. So then your father's name?

MH: Earl Cissel, Earl H. Cissel. And he also was from Muskogee. We had a cleaning business here and he was on Greenwood, 1317, was his first shop. And he moved across the street, 1316 North Greenwood. The 1317 address became Cliff Cleaners.

One of the wonderful things about my dad was that he was an excellent tailor. He had apprenticed under Ben McKinney. He was a teacher at Booker T. Washington High School, the old Booker T. Washington High School.

His first opportunity to show his skills was an old shop down here on Deep Greenwood in a cleaners called Carthon Cleaners. That's where he began his trade. He made suits for professional men and women. He was just an excellent tailor.

JE: Blacks and whites both?

MH: Yes, yes.

JE: That was his profession for his life.

MH: That was his profession. And of course, during that time, you know, this was the time when men and women, on certain days, really, really dressed. And I do remember he had some type of connection with a hattery. They made, I guess, an agreement that while we couldn't go to the hattery, they provided services for my dad 'cause he wanted to have hats in his cleaners and he wanted to be able to take care of them, clean them, and repair them, and whatever. So he worked out an agreement with a white hattery, I don't remember the name, but I do remember that wherever he could he made that connection to try to grow his business.

JE: There's a word you don't hear today, the hattery.

MH: Yeah.

JE: And hattery was a store—

MH: Yeah.

JE: . . . that sold?

MH: Nothing but hats for men. And of course, that was, as I said, during the time when men really, really dressed. Wouldn't consider themselves fully dressed without a hat, the shined shoes, and the whole look.

JE: Yes, yes, yes. And we have strayed a lot, haven't we, from all that?

MH: Yes we have, they're comfortable now. [laughs]

JE: So his personality must have been outgoing too then?

MH: Yes, and both musical enthusiasts. My dad loved jazz, blues. My mother was classical and gospel. So I had the opportunity to be surrounded by all of them, but my attraction was to my dad because I loved the jazz and the blues. [laughing]

JE: Yes of course. What was your dad's musical ability? Was he a singer, played an instrument?

MH: No, no, it was just a love for the music. And of course, during that time, oftentimes when entertainers would come to Tulsa they would stay in homes. If the one or two hotels I think down here on Deep Greenwood—I'm referring to it as Deep Greenwood because that's what we called it then—if the small hotel was filled, then, you know, you would have friends.

I remember Cleora, I'm trying to think of her last name, but she did a cookbook and had often said how many times she would have Cab Calloway stay in her house. She was well-known. In fact, she had, I think, a brother or so that was a performer as well.

JE: Did you pick up any musical ability yourself?

MH: I did, in fact, at one time my goal was to leave Tulsa and see myself probably in New York in some little quaint bar singing and playing. I did take piano. And as I said, my mother was trying to steer me toward classical music. I was running from the classical music to try to learn as much as I could about jazz.

That was one of my interests when I was a founder of the Oklahoma Jazz Hall of Fame.

JE: Right.

MH: But I was always surrounded by music. And of course, even gospel quartets that would come in would stay with families in North Tulsa.

Chapter 03 - 4:23

Deep Greenwood

John Erling: Where was Deep Greenwood?

Maxine Horner: Where we're located now, in fact, if you go further south, we would say from Archer to possibly, in this location where the Greenwood Cultural Center is sitting, in that area. That's where you had a combination of the Dreamland Theater, you had Williams Drug Store, you had doctors, and you had lawyers, and you had different businesses, and Clarence Love's Lounge. I think at one time, he was there on Greenwood and probably eventually moved there on Archer. But it was a combination of businesses, professional folks, and entertainment.

JE: We're here at 322 Greenwood. That whole district was—

MH: Possibly where you see the expressway going across Greenwood now—

JE: Right.

MH: I would say go beyond there, that's probably where you would say most of the activity was going on. Because it would be a combination in some areas of houses, rooming houses, and that type of thing in the area as well.

JE: Was that destroyed then in the Race Massacre?

MH: I wasn't there, of course, but—

JE: No. Let me ask you then about your parents, were they—

MH: No, they were not in Tulsa.

JE: Okay.

MH: But at the time that I was coming up, that whole area was completely rebuilt. Mr. W. D. Williams, who was a teacher at Booker T. Washington High School, and his family's name may still be on some of the buildings down there, I'm not real sure. But that's where the Dreamland Theater was located on the east side of Greenwood, and then surrounded by that would be businesses and entertainment.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

MH: I think through the resilience from the massacre, even though that whole area was totally destroyed, the citizens at that time came back and rebuilt. And of course, you know, Vernon and Mt. Zion were destroyed. And I think Vernon was just to the basement, I think the basement did survive. And so they went from the basement building back up again.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

MH: That whole area was completely demolished but citizens rebuilt in that area.

JE: Right. And you had brothers and sisters?

MH: I have two brothers, one of them here you may know him, Chuck, Charles Cissel is the baby of the family. Then I have a brother and a sister who live in Carolina. My brother in Carolina is Earl Cissel Jr., and my sister is Beverly Ann Cissel Milner.

JE: What was the first house you remember living in?

MH: The first house I remember living in was actually, I think in the area of Mt. Zion, because that house was moved and we moved from there. So that would have been on Elgin, I think. As a kid, I remember, I must have four or five at that time, and I just remember being briefly in that house. But most of my coming up was on Greenwood.

JE: When you say Mt. Zion, Mt. Zion . . . ?

MH: Baptist Church.

JE: Right.

MH: Yeah. That was homes in that area. When they were going to build a parsonage or whatever. I don't know if they expanded on that particular area or not. But I do remember being there just about the age of four or five.

JE: And then you refer to the other church as Vernon?

MH: Vernon AME Church, which is right across here from the Greenwood Cultural Center.

JE: And urban renewal took a lot from this area too, didn't it?

MH: Yes it did, yes it did.

JE: Changed the way of living for many people.

MH: The ugliest part of it I think was to run that expressway right across Greenwood, which, to me, is totally an eyesore. You know, going across Greenwood, but I understand many cities that has happened to. It really had its affects because it took away homes, it took away businesses in this area, because all up and down Greenwood, whether you were on this end of Greenwood or the other end of Greenwood, there were homes and businesses all the way through there. Many grocery stores.

I do remember Mr. Burns, that family did have survivors. Joe Burns I think probably is captured in some of the footage on the 1921 Massacre. But his family had a grocery store there probably about Greenwood and Newton. So there were many businesses up and down Greenwood. Cannon's Dry Goods Stores, another theater was in the area, Rex Theater, Ramsey Drug Store, so all of those things disappeared. Those grocery stores flourished but when that happened then some of those businesses were gone.

Chapter 04 - 4:57**Back of the Bus**

John Erling: The first school you attended?

Maxine Horner: Dunbar Elementary School, it no longer exists now, but that was located over on Pine between probably Madison and Lansing Street, I believe.

JE: Did you go to downtown Tulsa, and what was your experience if you did that and tried to shop in stores?

MH: Well, that's a very interesting question because there was some stores that you could not go into at all. Then there were some stores that had certain floors. I remember one store in particular called Seidenbach's. My first year in college, when I went into the store it was told that there was one of the floors that you absolutely could not go on.

And then there was Brown-Duncan, which is Dillard's now. And they had a store called The Tea Room.

But one of the things I think most families did and certainly mine was they were very strict about where we would go. Because they didn't want us to go through that type of humiliation of "We're not going to serve you." Even in as little a place like Cress, you know, like you might want to go in there and say, "I want to get an ice cream soda," at the counter, and they say, "Go to the end of the counter." But our folks were so strict and if you did you'd get in trouble.

At that time, you didn't understand why they were so protective. But they just didn't want us to go through that, so they would say, "And you'd better not go into this store, this store, and this store," and all those stores that they would name were the very stores that were not open to African Americans at that time.

JE: Yeah. And drinking fountains it said—

MH: "Colored only," yeah. The train station, I remember my first ride at the depot. I thought that was so surreal that the Oklahoma Jazz Hall of Fame would be in a place that once upon a time I went in there as a young teen, going away to school, and then there was a fountain that said, "Colored," and then there was a fountain that said, "White." And of course, my instructions from my parents were is that you don't drink from that fountain at all.

They'd pack your lunch and all that kind of stuff if you were making those trips. And I was going to Texas, so my ride of my first train, I remember going in that train station. And the same with bathrooms that existed at that time.

JE: Well, they wanted you to be proud of who you were and your heritage and did not want to have that injured. That was a great protective move, wasn't it, on their part?

MH: Absolutely. And I think you've probably heard of what they called the Green Book. When we would go on road trips in the car, and you would say, "Can we stop here?" You know, "I got to use the bathroom."

They said, "Wait, we're going to make a stop in a little bit." They never would explain, necessarily, but what was happening was that they knew that they had to make sure that they were getting completely into a town where African Americans lived or had services that we could take part of.

JE: And you're talking about when you were eight, nine, ten years old.

MH: Yeah, yeah.

JE: There was a point in your life where you got the story and understood what was going on. And I don't know if that was in junior high or high school. But do you remember, "Oh, now I understand"?

MH: Well, yeah, and it was the same on transportation. You get on the bus and if the bus was completely filled then you might have to give up your seat, you know. When they say, "Go to the back of the bus," I got a real big thing about getting on the bus and going to the very back of a bus.

JE: You had to do that?

MH: Of course the buses that ran in our neighborhood, usually there were African American drivers, so that was different. But if you were making a trip south, probably for many families who worked in south side Tulsa, they had the experience. Having been on their feet all day working in someone's home and then get on a bus and can't sit down.

JE: Yep. Junior high school, where did you go?

MH: Carver, and of course, we only had the one school. So students came from Booker T. Washington Elementary School, before the name changed to Charles S. Johnson, and Dunbar Elementary School. And I attended Carver Junior High School. That was the only junior high school in North Tulsa when I was coming along—that we could attend.

Interesting enough, I remember being very active in the Y—Mrs. Samuel Whitlow was the executive director of the North Tulsa YWCA. It's a Young Women's Christian Association. The only time we could go into what they called at that time the Central Y, was when you would have the hanging of the greens. And that would be at Christmas. But we did not engage in activities.

And here again, I guess it was that shield that most of our leaders tried to provide for us. Mrs. Whitlow would say, "Well, we're going to have ballet dancing and we're going to have these kinds of things." And culturally she would expose not only young people but adults as well to many of the things that they were not able to attend in South Tulsa.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

Chapter 05 - 5:25**Booker T. Washington High School**

John Erling: In 1946, you were thirteen years old, and that's when Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher applied at the University of Oklahoma and she was denied because of race. And then two years later, in '48, the Supreme Court ruled in Sipuel vs. Board of Regents, University of Oklahoma, that Oklahoma must provide instruction for blacks equal to that of whites. Were you aware of that happening?

Maxine Horner: Yes, absolutely. Because I also remember discussions stating that even when she was admitted she was not able to participate in the classes. That was what was told to me, I don't know how true that was.

JE: That business and back to Ted Owens, who was a basketball coach at the university then, and she was allowed in the room. But if the class was here she had to sit back.

MH: Yes.

JE: So she heard it but she was not included—

MH: Right.

JE: . . . with the class. Was that a discussion at school? Or how did it make you feel?

MH: Well, our teachers were always promoting continuing education. So rather than on concentrating on schools like the University of Oklahoma or TU or Oklahoma State University, the conversation would be on the schools like Howard, Fisk, Tennessee State, or Langston. And so your aspirations, if you were thinking in terms of continuing education, that was kind of burnt in your ears.

Even though the discussion was going on with what she was about and what she was fighting for. But I think the impact, certainly for my generation, was the concentration on where I would be able to go to school.

JE: Right, black colleges—

MH: Right.

JE: . . . that would accept you. You were in Booker T. Washington?

MH: Yes.

JE: And you graduated . . . ?

MH: Nineteen fifty-one. We were the first class to graduate from the new school. We entered in—that would have been '49, '50—we were eleventh graders when we entered. So we were the first class to graduate from the new school. Not the one standing now, but the very first built school there. Which was a dream of E. W. Woods—he had always been a strong advocate for a greater high school for North Tulsa. So we were very happy about being in that first class.

JE: It hadn't been integrated at that point, had it?

MH: No, it was a black high school.

JE: Right. So that was a good experience for you at Booker T.?

MH: Oh, absolutely. Even though there were what you would call secondary books and so forth, it was unacceptable with teachers that you wouldn't move forward and do the best you can.

I always brag and say that at the time I was coming along I don't know of anyone that could come out of Booker T. Washington that couldn't read. I mean, I don't care what your dream of—or take a twelfth grade education and become a very, very, very productive citizen, even if you didn't go to high school. I always say that we were very fortunate. We had the best teachers ever.

I remember that we had an assignment from one of our teachers, an English teacher, in fact. We only had one student in our little group that had what we called at that time, um, encyclopedia. So we all gathered at her house to do this research for our assignment. And you had to utilize the library. We were fortunate too that we had a library in North Tulsa, I think, at the time that I was coming along. It was Mrs. Christine Cary Davis who was the librarian. Even though things might not have been up-to-date, as best they could, they made sure that we had the best information available to us.

And I always say that some of the teachers that we had at that time were probably well more than qualified, had advanced degrees. They were just not, you know, undergraduate degrees. But they were very strong, strong, strong teachers. And demanded you be very, very good in your class.

And so I'm very proud of the fact that even though I came up in a segregated environment, I would say that I would put our education up against any of these kids coming through now. People talk about penmanship or English or diagraming sentences, knowing the capitals of our states. They say now they Google. And so if you ask them a question they'll Google and find the answers.

JE: Right. And it's nice to know that Booker T. Washington has a stellar reputation today as an integrated school. And it's scholastically is one of the best.

MH: Yes. Probably I would contribute that to even the teachers who did come during integration. And I think people like Nancy McDonald, I mean, you had strong advocates too once integration began from Burroughs School to Carver to Booker T., [indiscipherable], they made sure that once that integration path started that great teachers were mixed within those schools.

JE: Superintendent Bruce Howell too was there at the inception.

MH: Oh, yes, absolutely, he was the master of developing a lot of those programs. Yeah, we were fortunate that we had outstanding leaders at that time.

JE: I've interviewed Dr. Howell and Nancy McDonald for "Voices of Oklahoma." They talked about a young black student who they used to go into the white community and help recruit. And they'd go with him.

Chapter 06 - 3:52**Back to School**

John Erling: After Booker T., then you go on to college?

Maxine Horner: Yes. I went to Wiley College. I received a scholarship to go to Wiley College in Marshall, Texas. I really wanted to go to Lincoln University in Jefferson City. That was simply because I had gone on a trip there for a journalism trip that we did from our high school. Mr. Margon, A. L. Margon was the English teacher for seniors at that time. We were invited because we had the little school newspapers.

He wanted us to attend, and, of course, I fell in love with that campus and just the whole atmosphere at the time. Many of my friends were going there so I was the lonely soldier that went to Wiley College. I was there for two years. I got my associate's degree from Wiley College.

My parents, while they're divorced, I had siblings at home. So I made a decision that I would return home because I didn't want them to miss out on certain kinds of things with financial problems going on in the home.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

MH: So I wanted to come back. But I made a commitment, I said that one day, whenever that is, I still will go back at some point and get my degree.

JE: And you did that later on, didn't you?

MH: I did that much later on, I was in my fifties when I went to the main campus.

JE: At what college?

MH: At Langston.

JE: Langston.

MH: On the main campus. Of course, both my son and daughter, when I made that decision were out of school. While they were small and I was working I didn't have the discipline, I don't think, that I could do both with them.

And I had talked to Dr. Holloway and some of the others and had gotten some kind of assurance that, you know, I just wouldn't be that old lady in the class.

And so, I thought, *Okay, I know I'm going to be with eighteen-year-old kids. What do I wear?* And I put on, I think, a pair of khakis and a tee shirt or something.

So when I came into the classroom the students were kind of milling around. And one of the young guys said, "Man, get out of the way, here comes a teacher."
[both laughing]

JE: Oh, yeah, sure.

MH: I said, "No, I'm not a teacher, I'm one of you guys." And I made a lot of good friends with some of those kids. Didn't come off as trying to be a know-it-all, it was just this was a goal of mine that I wanted to achieve.

JE: I'm sure you brought a lot to the class because of your age. You had life experiences, so it was maybe easier for you? I don't know.

MH: Well, to some degree it was. The most difficult thing was that I would come home on the weekends because I had a husband. I wanted to make sure that I just wasn't this campus wife that never came home.

JE: Right.

MH: So I would come in on the weekends and then I would leave out on the Sunday evening. And sometimes maybe if I had a late class on Monday I would leave out on Monday mornings. That was my trip up and down that boring highway to Langston University.

JE: For two years.

MH: It was.

JE: Then you had a bachelor's degree.

MH: Yes.

JE: What were your interests at that point?

MH: I always had an interest in people and I had an opportunity to work in Personnel at Sunray DX Oil Company. It was at 9th and Detroit. That's what it was called at the time. I think the name changed to Sunoco. I guess I've been a lot of firsts.

But that's the first time that they'd hired a so-called professional, if they want to call a glorified secretary a professional, in that company. So I was placed in Personnel. Of course, that's a good spot because everybody can come by and say, "See, we hire black people." [both laugh]

JE: Yeah. Right.

MH: I think that's where my interests really did begin. I think in Personnel. And then having the opportunity to work for Congressman Jim Jones.

JE: All right, we're going to jump back from in your fifties, so out of college then, out of Wiley—

Chapter 07 - 5:03

Congressman Jim Jones

John Erling: You're talking about the work experience you just said.

Maxine Horner: Right.

JE: And then that also led to working for Congressman Jim Jones, representing this district.

MH: Right.

JE: How did that come about, your association with the congressman?

MH: Well, Mrs. Dargan and Gertrude Jones, when the congressman would come to town they always had big receptions and so forth for the congressman when he would come in. Because he was always very active in terms of visiting his district.

So when we were asked to volunteer in this campaign, certainly through Mrs. Dargan, I got involved with the campaign at that time. Then Mrs. Dargan and others had said to the congressman, you know, "It's about time that you put somebody of color in your office."

So I was recommended to go for an interview. He interviewed several and I was fortunate to be the one that he selected. I think that other than probably working for Mrs. Whitlow with the YWCA, that was one of the most fascinating jobs that I'd ever had. Because I didn't realize, first of all, what all a congressman did.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

MH: I didn't realize what kinds of things. And he had a personal approach to people. I mean, it was absolutely fascinating to me. He was so adamant, and I practice this to this day almost, is that when a phone would ring in Washington—people would actually call on different phones in the office—and if you didn't pick that phone up on that second ring, he was hot. He was not happy. There was no excuse.

And the same was true when he was doing town hall meetings. You had to be there and whatever those concerns were, wherever those problems were, they were recorded. You know, he had staff taking down and he would say, "Follow up." And even if he was leaving the next day going to Washington, he would call back and say, "Did Ms. Brown get her situation taken care of?"

JE: Yeah.

MH: I didn't really realize, and I think in addition to—you just think in terms of policies and governing and writing legislation and this type of thing—I had no that you could call on the congressman and say, "I didn't get my Social Security check." Or "I didn't get my IRS check," or whatever. And a call from his office could speed up that process.

JE: You were in your mid-twenties?

MH: Um (thinking sound).

JE: When this was happening?

MH: That was a little later.

JE: Later?

MH: A little later. Yeah, yeah.

JE: Okay, thirties? That was where the seed was planted for your service to our state.

MH: Yeah.

JE: He was a great role model, wasn't he?

MH: Oh, absolutely.

JE: So you probably conducted your office the way he did, in many ways.

MH: Very much so, particularly as it relates to constituents when you would get a call.

Because one of the things that I would often brag about was that this was something that was important. And also tried to educate people in my community that you should utilize—I don't care who's in office.

And one of the things I had said to the congressman, and I don't know if that's why I got the job or not, I said to him, "I don't want to just be your north side rep." I said, "So if you're talking about giving me an opportunity to work in your office I want to be wherever I need to be. I have thick skin so I am not afraid to go into areas that could be hostile to me because of my color." I said, "I'm okay with that because I know who I am and I'm very proud of that. But I don't want you to just rubber stamp me for North Tulsa."

I think maybe that had something to do with it as well.

JE: Oh, I'm sure it did. Did you ever find yourself in situations where even though you were representing him or with him that you were treated improperly?

MH: You know, one of the things I do remember, not necessarily to me, but on one of his campaigns. And I think, if I remember correctly, this was when the congressman decided to run for senator. I forget the city but some of the staff from Washington came down to, which they would often do, to volunteer during campaign time. We were in the city and I know that it was strong on western clothing.

One of the guys came up to one of his staff people and said, "You should have come however you're supposed to dress. I'm not impressed with the fact that you have on a shirt and boots and that hat 'cause that's not the real deal."

And you find a for-realness in people. I mean, you can come to our town, but be who you are. If you're going to try to have that western look, make sure you go to our stores and get the real look, you know.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

MH: That's the only, it wasn't at me, it was at them, but no, I think it was because of him. He's a soft-spoken type person but I think it was just the way he treated everybody. And I just never did have a bad experience, I'll say that, with him.

JE: Oh. I've interviewed him and you can hear his interview. And when he was a young man he worked for the president of the United States, Lyndon Johnson, and that's quite a story.

Chapter 08 - 6:37

Wayman Tisdale

John Erling: When did you get married and who did you marry?

Maxine Horner: I married Donald Michael Horner Sr. We married in 1954. We left Tulsa after a year 'cause he had been in the service. He had gone to school, he graduated from Booker T. Washington in 1948. He went to Hampton University and I guess he was still trying to discover himself. And so he went into the service.

He was encouraged while he was in the service that, you know, “You’re very good in math. You’re very good skill-wise.” So they had to offer him to go into different levels of military training and he was not interested as a career. But it must have struck a bell, because when he came out of the service and returned back to Tulsa, he started talking with some of the teachers here. And he wanted to get a degree in accounting.

Of course, he couldn’t go to OU or OSU or TU, and Langston at that time, I think the highest you could go would be a business administration degree. There was no accounting degree at that time at Langston University. One of his professors recommended University of Denver. And we went to Denver, that’s where he acquired his degree in accounting.

And then, of course, he returned back to Tulsa. I didn’t want to come back to Tulsa at the time because I fell in love with Denver. I thought it was a beautiful city. But I can’t complain because Tulsa’s been a good place to have a family and raise kids.

But he had his own accounting business and continued on until he passed.

JE: What year was that?

MH: He passed in 2000.

JE: How old would he have been?

MH: Latter sixties.

JE: So he was young then, wasn’t he, when you look back?

MH: Yeah, had pancreatic cancer.

JE: Okay.

MH: Yeah.

JE: And then—

MH: And that was just short-lived, I mean, it just took us by surprise. The only thing that could give me some kind of peace was the fact that he didn’t suffer.

JE: But it was a shock.

MH: Oh my God.

JE: After he discovered he had cancer, was it months or—

MH: No, and if he knew some things, sometimes men don’t always tell you, I began to sense, “Are you losing weight?” I began to ask questions.

And he was, “No, I’m good.”

So I got my son to start to try to encourage him and let’s get him to a doctor. So he did, and this was in June. In fact, very clearly I can remember it was right around the time that we celebrated Juneteenth—

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

MH: Because he didn’t want to attend the gala that we usually have for the Jazz Hall of Fame inductees. And I knew from that point on that it wasn’t good.

JE: Umm (sympathetic sound).

MH: Then some doctor said, "Oh, we can take care of it. We can really remove that."

And then one doctor talked with us, he said, "That is one of the things that is very, very hard to remove. And I don't know that it would be safe or not."

So he died in September of 2000.

JE: Two thousand. You had children from your marriage.

MH: Yes, I have two children, my daughter, Sherry Tisdale, and of course, you just met my son, Don, Don Horner Jr.

JE: All right.

MH: And I have five grandchildren, one great grandchild.

JE: Oh my. In fact, following in politics, was that Corey?

MH: Corey.

JE: And he worked as a staffer for Dan Boren, didn't he?

MH: Yes he did.

JE: So you've got that politics going.

MH: Well, he was with me from the time that he was a little bitty kid. Because he would usually go over with me when students could come, when I was in the legislature. Sometimes I used to tease and say, "We're going to make you a junior senator, 'cause, I mean, you're here all the time." But yeah, he has done very well, in fact, came out of the JAG program. So he's an attorney and he's stepping out there on his own.

JE: Is he here in Tulsa?

MH: No, he's in the DC area.

JE: As an attorney?

MH: Yeah.

JE: We should mention about your daughter, Sherry. She became quite well-known on her own. She was a model, magazine publisher.

MH: Yeah.

JE: Maybe she still is.

MH: She still has that fashion bug, so yeah, she's still involved with that as well.

JE: She got that from you, didn't she?

MH: [laughing]

JE: Yeah? And then she married William Tisdale.

MH: William, yeah.

JE: Who was the brother of Wayman Tisdale.

MH: Wayman Tisdale.

JE: There's another cancer story there because Wayman died in 2009.

- MH:** And that was another shocker. You know how you say you just didn't see that coming? And such a great guy, you know, such a great guy. But I guess, here again, you know, when you're trying to look back on some things, and you say the fact that he just didn't have to, you know, where you just see them spiraling and losing all capabilities of life.
- JE:** You probably saw him on those latter times, I bet.
- MH:** I did.
- JE:** When you think about him, three-time All-American at University of Oklahoma, played twelve seasons in the NBA, and of course, was a great jazz bass guitarist, many, many CDs, to see a man who by the time he was forty-four years old was in the condition that you saw him in. It had to be—
- MH:** For everyone, and you really thought, you keep saying, you know, "We got this, we're going to beat this." And I guess the other thing is that his spirit, he was never a downer.
- JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).
- MH:** That smile that he had was just infectious. It isn't until, I'm sure, probably the wife and family began to see things differently. You know, you start seeing, *Oh, God, this is not good.*
- JE:** Yeah. Well, that's passing affected the whole family, of course. And William today, what is he doing?
- MH:** William is working at—don't know the name of the firm—but he's with an insurance firm. And so he's doing insurance concerns now.
- JE:** William and Wayman were actually teammates at Booker T. Washington, weren't they?
- MH:** Yes, oh, yeah, they were the due team.
- JE:** Right.
- MH:** Of course, William was older than Wayman. When they went on to OU that was the name that was ringing across the state all the time.
- JE:** Right.
- MH:** The duo team.
- JE:** So you were caught up in the athletics of all that?
- MH:** Oh, yeah.
- JE:** Yeah.
- MH:** When he was with the Sacramento Kings, my husband and I, because my daughter, of course, being married to William, we made a trip to Sacramento. We had an opportunity to see Wayman actually play.
- JE:** Yeah. He—
- MH:** And also him performing. I always said, I said, "Basketball is just your trip to do what you really want to do as music." And he loved music.
- JE:** Didn't he also say that music really was his first love?

MH: Yes, absolutely. Absolutely.

JE: Yeah. William and Wayman then had an older brother and his name was?

MH: Weldon.

Chapter 09 - 9:20

Run for Office

John Erling: I know now you had this relationship with Congressman Jim Jones. When did you decide to run for office and why?

Maxine Horner: Well, Senator Bernard McIntyre was the senator at the time. One of the persons who really was, became my campaign manager was Shirley Johnson. She said, "You really should run for that seat."

I said, "No, I like working in the background. That's not anything that I'm really interested in doing. That's not mine to do."

She said, "Well, you're always talking about all the things that you do in the congressman's office and that type of thing. Why wouldn't you consider it?"

And so I was talking with my daughter and she was the one that gave me that push. Because she said, "Well, why not do it in your name?" She said, "You're always bragging about the congressman, maybe here's an opportunity for you to do some of the things in your name." She was really the one to give me that push.

And I want to tell you, I took a beating because, you know, I was up against eleven or twelve people in that primary. And one of them being Dr. Chappelle's son. I mean, I had a rough ride there for a minute.

JE: This was an open seat.

MH: Yes.

JE: Was that in 1986?

MH: That was in 1986.

JE: In district number eleven.

MH: Eleven.

JE: Again you said, how many were running for the seat?

MH: I think there was one other female and I know Dr. Chappelle's son, a judge who passed, he ran because he was a Republican. Now he was very, very nice, but there was at least ten of us in that race, I think, if I remember correctly.

JE: Did they have debates then?

MH: Oh, yes.

JE: Oh, yeah.

MH: I think the other thing is, you know, you've been some person's been on the scene but you've not been in the news. And you've not been here, there, and they haven't seen you, whatever, and they're like, "Where is she coming from?"

And then some of the guys had the idea that women don't belong in doing that. As they began to throw out those kind of things, that just gave me more strength. Because I said, "If you win, you're going to have to outwork me. That's one thing that I will do." I said, "So they will get to know me."

I think in East Tulsa I was told that if I put flyers out there not to put my picture on the flyers because the people out there, they don't seem to know who's in office. And he said, "That can be a killer for you."

And I said, "Well, that's going to change because they have to know who I am. Because if I'm going to be representing this district, then I want them to know that I'm there for everyone."

One of the persons that lived in that area started walking with me. And that's where one of the guys told me, and you know, you did run across some that said, "I don't trust politicians and you're not going to ever do anything and it's just a bunch of talk and it's just a bunch of this." He had that strange voice.

And when I had been elected, I got this call. My assistant said, "This man seems really irate on the phone."

So I said, "Well, I'll talk with him." When I heard his voice, I said, "I remember you. You were sitting on your porch," and I said, "you distinctly told me that politicians never did do anything and never responded."

And I said, "But I'm here to tell you, I'm here to listen to whatever your concern is."

So he started laughing and he said, "You absolutely remember?"

I said, "Yeah, I remember. I can see you right now sitting on that porch. And you did let me in your yard." I said, "At first I didn't think you were going to let me inside your gate." So we kind of had a laugh about it.

JE: But you had two things then against you: The fact that you were African American and you were a female.

MH: Right.

JE: And in East Tulsa they didn't like the African American side? Or the female? You had both to overcome.

MH: I don't know if that was just that guy's perception.

JE: Oh, okay.

MH: You know?

JE: Yeah.

MH: Because I remember that Don Anderson, when he ran and lost, we were working Don Ross and, gosh, everybody was trying to get it together for Don. And can't remember his name now but he came out of Pawhuska, and he beat Don Anderson that year. Because Don Anderson had always won up in, he was a rep, you know he served in the House. And was very popular and everything.

But he had gone on some trip, a conference of something, and this guy came out of Pawhuska, and started knocking on doors.

And those people said, "Well, we didn't know exactly who our rep was and we're glad to know who you are."

That really stuck with me because you can't beat knocking on those doors and introducing yourself to people. And it's okay if they disagree with your platform or they have concerns or whatever. But that stuck with me. I said, "You can't be so far removed that you get away from the voter, because that's important."

JE: You reference Anderson, but that was not in this district. You were just using him as an example.

MH: Well, his House district was 73.

JE: That's—

MH: Seventy-two, or whatever. But whatever area he served he had a bit of Osage.

JE: All right. And so because—

MH: Yeah, but he lived in Gilcrease.

JE: Okay, but—

MH: And I think he was real strong, if I remember correctly. Don Anderson was very strong on health issues.

JE: And the primary then, you came out along with someone else, because you had a runoff in the primary.

MH: Right, Bob—

JE: Were you a top vote getter or second?

MH: I, I was first, after the primary. I didn't get the percentage that I needed but I had the top number. Homer Johnson, I was trying to think of, that's who I was up against. Homer was like the godfather, almost, of North Tulsa at that time.

JE: Wow.

MH: Homer was quite involved with mile cities and all of that that was going on, but that's who my opponent was on the Democratic ticket. And that's who I had the runoff with. And I won.

Then I had to go into a general, I guess, Judge Chappelle.

JE: Do you think you just outworked Homer?

MH: Oh, I did. I had to.

JE: You worked harder?

MH: And I think my campaign manager was very creative in getting stuff to the media, flyers, anything, I mean, I don't know how many mailings we might have done. And I guess at some point they said, you know, "This person, whoever it is, if you were laid back and would not—" out there, she made sure, I mean, I would have say that the reason being in that office would be because of Shirley, and certainly Don Ross.

I would definitely have to say that because Don was a yard sign person. You know, he was like, "Get them yard signs and get them here. I can go up to those doors."

And so I would say between those two—

JE: Shirley, who was she?

MH: At that time, tied in here with the Greenwood Cultural Center, she was director of what we call Business Industrial Development Corporation, which also housed the North Tulsa Heritage Foundation. She controlled both and, of course, once we had the building here, she was the person who was in charge of the Greenwood Cultural Center.

JE: So then in the general election, you were running against Judge Chappelle.

MH: Yeah. Carlos Chappelle.

JE: And how in the world did you beat him?

MH: Well, that was very interesting because he was a Republican. When I went and talked to his dad, Dr. Chappelle had supported me in the primary. And he sat down and he said, "But that's my son." He didn't have an opponent at all, his son didn't. And he said, "But I'll have to leave you if you come out okay in the primary." He said, "But you can count on my support in the primary."

And we understood that going in. But the district at that time was heavy with Democrats.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative). This district encompasses both black and whites, doesn't it?

MH: Right, right.

JE: So it wasn't an all-black district. You win, was it close?

MH: I don't remember the numbers but it was not close.

JE: The swearing in day?

MH: That was absolutely, you know, it's almost like you have an out of body experience.

JE: Yes, right.

MH: This is really happening to me. My girlfriend of many, many years, which you probably know her name, Mabel Rice, she said, "Well, I'll be darned, we did it."

And I just had such wonderful support at that time too.

JE: Yeah, what an exciting day it was for you.

MH: But it was.

JE: I will say, we're having extra noise out here—

MH: Yes.

JE: . . . because they're blowing leaves. But I think we can overcome that.

Were you the first African American woman to serve in the Senate?

MH: Yes but it shared with Judge Vicki Miles-LaGrange. Because she won in Oklahoma City.

JE: So the two of you came in?

MH: Yeah, we came in in the same first two.

JE: As the first two African American women to first serve in the Oklahoma Senate.

The first African American male member of the Oklahoma Senate was E. Melvin Porter.

MH: Yes.

JE: In 1965.

MH: Yes.

JE: First African American member of the House of Representatives was A. C. Hamlin in 1908.

MH: Yes.

JE: Hard to believe.

MH: Yes.

JE: A year after statehood. First female House member was Hannah Diggs Atkins.

MH: Atkins.

JE: In 1968. Today there are nine females in the Oklahoma Senate, twenty-three in the House, that's a total of thirty-two women out of 149 seats we had.

MH: Yeah.

JE: That's about 21 percent. So women are making gains, aren't they?

MH: Yeah. Gradually [laughing].

JE: Yeah.

Chapter 10 - 2:10

Introduced First Bill

John Erling: How were you treated then both as female and black in our capital?

Maxine Horner: Well, I think one thing about being in the Senate is that it's more formal. I would just kind of compare that with the House. And it's smaller. I think that overall it's sort of like almost a recipe, if you will, for senators to carry yourself in a certain way and behave and treat everybody with respect and dignity.

Now your opposition, when you've got something on the floor that they didn't like or they weren't for, are certainly going to attack. But I think overall I never experienced any

racial slurs. I mean, they'd take me on if they didn't like that bill that I was bringing to the floor. But it was about who they were representing.

And then, of course, you had advocates there. Senator Shedrick, outstanding female, and even Senator Helen Cole, who was outstanding. It was just like a camaraderie.

I remember the time I was going to introduce my first bill on the floor.

JE: What was it?

MH: I think it was dealing with discrimination, of drive-by.

JE: Drive-by shootings?

MH: Yes. Helen Cole came over and put her hands on my shoulder. She said, "You're going to be fine. Just speak your piece, speak your truth."

JE: Yeah, yeah.

MH: "And you'll be fine."

JE: Good.

MH: That was the kind of thing, you know. Even if it's something that they couldn't support.

I remember there was a senator, I think I made a little slur to him when I was dealing with "traveling while black." I said, "You have no understanding because you have not walked in my shoes."

And he said, "And you haven't walked in mine either, in my district, so . . ." [both laughing]

JE: Right. So back at you, right?

MH: So, you know, yes.

JE: That human rights issue then, the drive-by shooting, did it pass? What was it about?

MH: We did, in fact, I really was trying to get sexual orientation included in there. I never could get that in, I mean, the human rights bill did go forward but some of the things did have to come out.

JE: You came in in '86, so like '87, '88 you were dealing with that?

MH: 'Eighty-seven, '8–yeah.

Chapter 11 - 8:50

OHLAP

John Erling: You played a major role in Oklahoma Promise, OHLAP, as we call it, Oklahoma Higher Learning Access Program, which funds scholarships to Oklahoma colleges for students from families that earn fifty thousand dollars or less in income. You played a major role in that. And tell us the role you played.

Maxine Horner: That's my baby.

JE: Yeah.

MH: That's my idea. And all the things of all the legislation that gives me more pride and joy—that piece of legislation. And it was not easy to get that done because at the beginning there was not going to be any money put into it. So, you know, you were talking about four years before the legislature would look at saying funding was going to be there. And then, of course, how are you going to say to parents, "I want you to sign up for this and I think we're going to have the money, you know, in four years."

It was not very popular at that time with many legislators, and then they were not happy with the grade point average. They wanted to put it at 3. and above or 3.5, and I was standing firm on 2.5 because what I was saying was that there may be extenuating circumstances these young people are going through and it doesn't have anything to do. So you've got other kinds of avenues for bright scholarly students.

John, I went back to what I'd heard all my life in my home was, "Education, education." And I said, "This is an opportunity." Most parents, if I can even get them thinking beyond the ninth grade that, "Your kid can go to school and this is what can happen for you."

I have gone over to the capital when they had the rally day, even though the name has changed. I think we started out less than thirty thousand dollars, I think, initially. But to get that passed and now to see it grow, and then to have young people come up to me and say, "I'm an OHLAP graduate."

JE: Yeah.

MH: That is the most rewarding thing ever.

JE: Right. Where did the idea come from?

MH: Well, I was on my way back to Oklahoma City, *60 Minutes* I think it was, I was listening to going back on a Sunday evening. That was gentleman, I can't remember his name, but he was on *60 Minutes*. He was talking about what Louisiana should do in terms of educating, providing education for students. So that's where it hit for me.

JE: So you then brought the concept to the legislature.

MH: I did.

JE: Okay, here's the idea, what do you do next?

MH: I got with staff, then we started dealing with names. And once I got support from the leadership, then that was a go.

JE: Okay.

MH: I think it was Garrett who was Secretary of Education at that time, Sandy Garrett. She always said she was okay with it but I wasn't real sure. Then they tried to say, "Well, let's just try to distinguish the bill and say for, like, impoverished families."

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

MH: And I said, “No, this is not what I’m talking about. I’m talking about any person. We’re going to cap the income,” I said, “but many parents are thinking, ‘If I can just get my kid through the twelfth grade I’m good.’ ” I said, “But if they can start thinking early on that there’s a chance for my kid to go to school.” And I’m proud to say that even TCC patterned their bill similar to at that time the OHLAP Bill , and they went a step further because I think they included books. That’s a tremendous increase for students.

And then convincing the House. You’ve got many more people over on the House side, you know, and they were going to tear this bill up. And I have to say that Don Ross was the House author. Carolyn Thompson was Chair of Education, higher ed. So he said, “If we’re going to get this thing done, let’s bring Carolyn into the fold.”

And that’s another thing that you learn to do over there is being able to get with other people. And even if you have to take a back seat sometimes on some things. But the goal is to get it done.

“If we’re going to get this thing out of committee,” he said, “let’s bring Carolyn in on it.”

And she was for it, all the way.

JE: Carolyn?

MH: Carolyn, she’s married to Stratton. I said Thompson but she’s Carolyn Taylor.

JE: Carolyn Taylor.

MH: His wife, yeah.

JE: Wife.

MH: But she was Chair of Higher Ed at that time. But they were not married at that time.

Then on the floor and with the respect that she had and all that kind of stuff, you just go through all those motions to make sure that you’ve got your votes in place. She said, “Let’s not put it out there until we know we got the votes.” They came in.

JE: She brought the House in.

MH: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah. And Don took the back seat, even though he was the author. He said, “I’m just telling you how this thing works over here.”

So I took his advice. And, of course, I was happy to see it get moved out of the State Department of Education and get located in the Regents Office.

JE: State Regents Office.

MH: State Regents Office. And Sid Hudson, all those people, I mean, you just start having all kinds of good support coming from people who are real strong on education issues.

JE: So then you had to get it funded. And you said you were waiting four years to get it funded?

MH: Well, because initially there was not going to be any money put in, you know, like, we’re going to start now. So by four years, you know, and I guess the one thing was to be revving in neutral when it passed.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

MH: But they knew that funds were going to be put in there. For the longest, we were really kind of worried about it because rural Oklahoma was grabbing it and running with it. And Tulsa County and Oklahoma County, you would think the big schools would have—and maybe they didn't know—that's where I said the higher Regents Office, when they got into it they started marketing it differently. Doing things in the schools and making students aware that this is available to you.

JE: Yeah. Maybe it's more now but it has awarded nearly seven hundred million dollars over seventy-five thousand Oklahoma college students.

MH: Yes. Yeah, and I'm proud to say too that even when there was argument against the 2.5, most of those young people who went in, they were scoring much higher than 2.5 in college. I keep up with it. I still stay in touch with the Regents Office and track that, you know, just to see how it's doing.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

MH: There's one young lady, and I believe her name is Munson, Representative Munson, and she is an OHLAP graduate. She's serving in the House. She has kind of taken that on as a point to move forward with it.

JE: Well, as of a few years ago, there were at least two sitting members of the Oklahoma House of Representatives as well as a Chief of Staff for the President Pro-tem in the Senate, who are former recipients of those scholarships.

MH: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: That's pretty amazing.

MH: Yes.

JE: I mean, when you go to bed at night and think, *Hmm, what have I done?* All you need to do is think of that.

MH: Right. As I said, that is the most rewarding of anything else that I did there. I think that I would say that was my greatest achievement.

JE: I'm going to quote the *Oklahoma Journal Record*. It said, "Many leaders have come and gone but the extraordinary work of this quiet gentle woman from Tulsa's Greenwood District fundamentally changed Oklahoma's higher education system. Hugely expanding the opportunities available for high achieving but underprivileged students."

MH: Yeah, yeah.

JE: They ought to put a statue for you.

MH: [laughing]

JE: They do it for Bob Stoops and other people, they should for you as well. Believe me, they should. So, congratulations. That was nice of you to include 2.5 students as well.

MH: Yeah.

JE: As a grade point average.

MH: And the other thing was, if that language still exists, say, for instance, you're not challenged to go to college, I wanted them to get that Vo Tech. My thought was, say, for instance, you went in to Vo Tech and you went into drafting. Maybe once you got into it you said, "Wow, I probably could look at architectural stuff and move forward."

And I said, "It could be a dream to move forward." I kind of placed myself in that area. I made a commitment when I left Wiley that, "I'm going to get it at some point. I don't when I'm going to get it but I'm going to get there."

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

MH: And so the Vo Tech training was part of that as well.

JE: Yeah, that's good.

MH: And even some of the legislators who were against it, they started coming and saying, "Can we put an amendment on here and include private schools?" You know, the private universities.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

MH: My thing is, first and foremost, our state schools are our priority. And that can be available a tier down.

JE: It's a little late for me to say it, but congratulations. [laughing]

MH: Well, thank you.

Chapter 12 - 2:03

Jazz Hall of Fame

John Erling: Then you created the Oklahoma Jazz Hall of Fame.

Maxine Horner: Yes.

JE: Where did that come from?

MH: There was a Professor Savage at OU. He did a book *Singing Cowboys and All That Jazz*. He did an interview here at the Greenwood Cultural Center and he started talking about all of these artists that really came from Oklahoma.

So afterwards, I said, "You know, I'm from a home that all kinds of music going on." And I said, "I never heard of some of these people that you're talking about." Some of them I knew.

Well, as an example, he said, "Most people think Jay McShann is from Kansas City. He's from Muskogee, Oklahoma." He said, "Chet Baker is from Yale, Oklahoma."

When he started running them down I just got excited. I think Bob Carlson was pro-tem at the time. I got an appointment to come in and sit down and talk with him. I shared

my idea and I know he looked at me like, you know, *I've got many more things on my desk and she's in here talking about some type of hall of fame.*

And I said, "I'm not asking for any money right now." I had worked it out that it could have a home here in the Cultural Center. We would go from there. And then, of course, you had that wonderful Betty Price, who was director of the State Arts Council that was always creative and interested in anything in the arts.

She became excited and did loan one of her staff people to do a grant, to do some research on some of the Oklahomans. In fact, I think there's still in the Hall of Fame, a photo of all of the jazz musicians that came out of Oklahoma.

JE: Um-hmm, um-hmm (affirmatives).

MH: So that's where it originated. Because even Dr. Savage said, "Well, you're wasting your time."

I said, "Wouldn't it be great to be able to acknowledge these people?" I said, "That's a diamond in the rough." We had Hal Singer over in Paris. And I said, "People need to know this, I mean, Oklahoma needs to know that they have these treasures all over the world."

JE: Right.

MH: And he thought it would never happen.

For me, John, I think anytime somebody says, "That's not going to work," or "You can't do that," it just gives me that added momentum and strength to—

JE: Yeah.

MH: . . . keep working at it.

Chapter 13 - 8:37

Race Massacre Commission

John Erling: The 1921 Race Riot Commission in 1997, you were involved with that.

Maxine Horner: Yes.

JE: What was its purpose?

MH: Well, actually, that was a platform for Representative Ross, because when he ran for office and had listed the things that he wanted to accomplish on his political agenda that was one of them. Because when he learned anything about the massacre, he was a student.

JE: Yeah.

MH: He said, "Well, we'll do a study, we'll develop a commission." However he wanted to do it.

And so I was the Senate author over on the Senate side. But actually, we wouldn't be even having this conversation even now had it not been for him. Because he was the one who brought it to light. And that's when the commission started doing a study.

And then got a chance to talk to all of these people who wouldn't even have talked about it many years ago. We do have it documented in their own words, their stories.

JE: Yeah.

MH: And as we moved forward, the study was done to not only bring attention to what had happened, but also to talking about the mass graves and so forth.

JE: Right.

MH: This is where it really started—it started with him.

JE: We're sitting here in the Oklahoma Cultural Center and in this room, lining the walls, are pictures of survivors. And there's a little description there of them, how old they were. Some have memories and others don't. But it's all lining the room, twenty-five or thirty of them that are survivors that I'm looking at.

MH: Yeah.

JE: As we are talking about this. Did your parents talk in the family about this?

MH: They didn't, and that was the thing, I don't know whether there was fear that it could happen again. Even from the survivors, when you would talk to them it was like pulling teeth when we introduced the study.

And then they began to really become involved. When I say "they," the survivors, and talk about what had happened.

I think as a kid when I was growing up, if you had asked the question, even later, I think as a teen or something, it was all, "Let bygones be bygones." So it was really never discussed. Just never discussed.

And I think W. D. Williams, because his people had so much property in the area, and, then of course, he was a survivor himself, with his family, he would talk about it.

And this was when Don Ross said, "That couldn't be, I mean, I never heard that before." And he even says that he had survivors from his own family. So even in his own family—

JE: Yeah.

MH: . . . they didn't talk about it. The only thing that I can just assume is that at the time, and as horrific as that was, "If we get past this, hopefully, it'll never happen again, so let's just don't talk about it."

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative). W. D. Williams again, he was?

MH: He was a teacher at Booker T. Washington high school.

JE: Booker T. So did they teach it when you were at Booker T.?

MH: No, no.

JE: Didn't talk about it at all?

MH: Never, no. And many of his photos, from the Williams' family, and his daughter was Dr. Anita Christopher. Some of those photos are even in the Smithsonian—

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

- MH:** . . . African American Museum now. But he had a collection of photos.
- JE:** Some of the points of his purpose of direct payment of reparations to survivors of the massacre, today that hasn't happened. Direct payment of reparations to descendants, that scholarship fund available to students affected by the massacre. Did that happen?
- MH:** That was led by Totten Garbarino. That's when he was with the Chamber. I don't know what the status of the scholarship is but that was available, because they did have students participating, writing essays or whatever to try to qualify for a scholarship.
- JE:** Okay. Yeah. The establishment of an economic development enterprise zone in the historic area of the Greenwood District, I don't know if that happened or not.
- MH:** I think that's a zero.
- JE:** And then a memorial for the reburial of the remains of the victims of the Tulsa Massacre. There is a memorial now.
- MH:** There is. That was one of the things out of the study, the reconciliation park, over there and the sculptor.
- JE:** John Hope Franklin Reconciliation Park.
- MH:** Yes.
- JE:** We should say, currently, there was talk about the mass graves.
- MH:** Graves.
- JE:** They are now revisiting areas or areas that have never been visited about possible mass graves.
- MH:** Right.
- JE:** Our present mayor, G. T. Bynum, directed that. I think they made one search. They're using today technology that they never had way back when.
- MH:** I'm serving as chair of that particular oversight committee. The charge from the mayor's office to focus initially on the three sites, New Block, Oak Lawn, and the cemetery at, I guess it's called, Rolling Hills. But in the day it was called Booker T. Washington. Those three sites was the charge from the mayor. And, of course, Counselor Hal Harper as well as the mayor, said, "We want to pick up. It was incomplete when the state finished its commission report, or some things were not achieved. We will go further and visit these sites."

That is taking place, in fact, we're looking to have a report in December, the findings from those sites that they have gone in to see.

And also you have people with expertise that deal with the historical aspect of it. They've got to also discover too whether some of this was actually 1921 or was it something that could have happened later on?

Then you have some of the Native Americans who are saying, "We want to be very sensitive of the grounds because we want to make sure that our tribal grounds are not being included in this."

And so there's people of expertise that are moving in that direction, to come with some kind of resolve.

JE: Just think, this happened 1921, and here we are in the year 2019, and we're still very, very much dealing with this. The official count of those who died ranges from thirty-six to approximately three hundred. Over a thousand residences burned, another four hundred looted.

You know, I've talked in another interview, Rueben Gant, I asked him, "What would Tulsa be like if the Race Massacre had not happened?"

His immediate response was, "All the families who left and went to Chicago and other places who were very successful, and chances are they would have still been here. Their families would have been here. So we lost that kind of expertise."

MH: Yeah, we did, we did.

JE: Right.

MH: Because many of those people, some that you read about, went on to achieve professional careers, fleeing from Tulsa. I think one of them being the Stout family out of Chicago. I think he was a judge in that area.

You know, some could have gone to California, but some of the areas that they did go to, like Chicago, was, I guess, closer than California. But I think that I would be in agreement that as successful as they were, even in a segregated community, there wouldn't have been a reason for them to leave.

JE: No. You know, in '97, this became more of the talk of the area. I remember talking to people who were in their fifties and sixties and they were just learning about it.

MH: Yeah.

JE: Never talked about it in high school. "I didn't know that," they'd say.

MH: Well, one of the commission members who was a legislator, a senator, he said, "I'm a history teacher," and he said, "I never knew anything about it."

I was looking at *The Watchmen* that appeared here a couple of weeks ago, the very first episode. One of the comments of a radio commentator, she said, "I consider myself a complete 100 percent history buff." And she said, "This is what I do, the research and all this." She said, "I had never heard of this," until she saw that opening of that plane flying over Greenwood destroying the area.

So that has been a lot of talk. And I believe that the guy that's playing in that segment, Tim Nelson, I believe that's Ruth Kaiser Nelson's son or relative.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

MH: I think.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

MH: But he's involved in that segment.

JE: It's HBO, I believe—

MH: Right.

JE: . . . it is right now.

MH: Yeah, it is.

Chapter 14 - 4:27

First Female Caucus Chair

John Erling: When the Murrah Building bombing, Oklahoma City bombing happened April 19, 1995, where were you?

Maxine Horner: I was on my way back to Tulsa for the service of Mrs. Thelma Whitlow. Because my family in Carolina were going nuts. They had no idea of the location in Oklahoma City. All they heard was what was happening in Oklahoma City. And my brother was going bonkos, saying, "Where are you?" And that was unbelievable to me.

And then there were some people, of course, that you knew, staff people from different agencies that you knew.

JE: That died?

MH: Yes. It was just unbelievable. It was almost like you're saying, "Am I just I a bad nightmare?"

JE: Yeah.

MH: "And I'm going to wake up and this really isn't happening." That was very destructive.

JE: You were the first female to serve as a Democratic Caucus chair.

MH: Yes, that was an interesting position to hold. Stratton Taylor was Pro-tem at the time. He appointed me to serve as that chair. It was one that I took on very seriously because you've got to try to make sure that if we're for something, then let's stand together 100 percent.

One of the things for me was I was never concerned about whether I'm going to be reelected or not. Because I always felt like I'm working for that district. And I think that at any point that I'm not doing a job then they can vote me out. And that's the way it should be. And as I look at it even on a national scene now, and I think that should come first and foremost.

I always share the little joke about the fact that my very first experience as a freshman legislator I was so totally against smoking. And you know how you, when you see stuff come across your desk, and, you know, *I can't be for this*, and blah, blah, blah, blah. And then when you have these people barge into your office and start sitting down and talking to you, you know, "We have rights too," and you start listening to both sides

of a situation. You say, “Whoa.” You have to take yourself completely out of it. It’s not about you and your personal opinions. Now you’ve got to listen to people on both sides of this.

And I just always tried to vote and tried to be on the right side of history.

JE: You were term limited, so how many years did you serve?

MH: I actually was grandfathered in because when I went in, and see, when that legislation was passed, they started from that point on. So I went in in ’86.

JE: Six.

MH: And my last year was 2004.

JE: So how many years did you serve in the Oklahoma legislature?

MH: Eighteen years.

JE: Eighteen years. When you said that you didn’t run to get reelected, you just took on every issue that you believed in, I always felt that Henry Bellmon was that way.

MH: Yes.

JE: First Republican governor.

MH: Yes.

JE: Which governors that you served under—and you served under a few of them, didn’t you—come to mind that’s maybe helping you more? Or any of them that stand out in your mind?

MH: Let me say it this way: I think one of the things that I admired, if I’d point out a governor, and I would say, “Governor Henry Bellmon.” And the reason I say that is because when he was having difficulty with House Bill 1017 there seemed to be some opposition from his own party. Whatever criticism he was getting and whatever was being thrown at him in a negative way, he said, “We need to get this done.” And—

JE: And House Bill 1017 was an education bill.

MH: Yes. Here again, that goes back to my own root. But I thought, *Here’s a man that says, “Although I’m a Republican, I’m talking about something bigger than being a Republican. And this is something that we need to do.”*

JE: Yeah.

MH: That’s one of the things that I always remember because he came to our caucus. And, you know, “If I can get all of you all on board, I mean, I don’t care if they’re over here saying, ‘It’s not going to happen.’ So in other words, if I need Democratic votes to get this done, I’m not going to put up my hands and say, ‘My party doesn’t want to do this and so I’m not going to do it.’ ”

He was just a principled person.

JE: Yeah. They ought to put a statue up for him too.

MH: Yes.

JE: You here and him right over here.

MH: [laughs]

JE: And then you were chair of the Business and Labor Committee. You were so effective over there.

Chapter 15 - 9:35

Run from Negativity

John Erling: As you look back on your career, I think I know the answer to this, you're most proud of what?

Maxine Horner: Absolutely, I'll say my OHLAP bill.

JE: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MH: I would say that is the greatest achievement ever because it has affected so many people in the state.

JE: Yeah.

MH: And to be able to see their faces when I've gone over for the rallies. And they say, "Will you take a picture with us?" or whatever.

Then you have someone come up and say, you know, "Had it not been for this bill I would not have been able to get through school."

That is the most rewarding thing ever that could happen. And I'm so glad that now leadership has moved forward, looked at it, and improved on it along the way and realized that they needed to do something about family income. So I'm real happy that that's moving in a direction that can bring even more people in who are not just limited to a very small income.

JE: Right. And again, you got the idea from the *60 Minutes* production.

MH: It was a *60 Minutes* production. And he was out of Louisiana.

JE: And you grabbed that idea.

MH: And he actually came to Oklahoma. I just wish I could remember his name.

JE: Yeah. He came because of this?

MH: Yes.

JE: Yeah, well, the fact that you took an idea and ran with it.

Mentors, there are certain people who you would look to you as your mentors, were helpful to you, can you name some of them?

MH: Well, first and foremost, I would say my mom. The greatest ever—I would say my mom. And then I would have to say one outstanding woman was Thelma Whitlow. She was

director of North Tulsa YWCA for many, many years. And of course you know, her husband was Mr. Whitlow, who was principal of Booker T. Washington High School.

Living in a segregated community and seeing firsthand someone in a professional capacity was Mrs. Whitlow. And I think the fact that she was always bringing cultural things, even though you were denied access to them in Tulsa, in the segregated community. She made sure that even if the instructors would not allow you in that studio, she made arrangements somehow to get them to come to the North Y and do a teaching, even if although they were only teaching little black kids.

JE: Oh, yeah.

MH: I would have to say, those two people, of course there are some others, but I would have to say, those two—and I would go to her a lot for advice. If I was thinking about doing something, just to get her input. Just to have that positive influence on me as a kid and even as an adult was part of who I am today.

JE: That's great. And I'm sure you've been a mentor to many.

MH: Hopefully I have.

JE: Yes. This is kind of out of place, but the lunch counter sit-ins that were started in the '60s. Are you tied to that in any way?

MH: No, I did march, I did march through the streets. And, of course, I always kind of laugh at the fact that when there was a cafeteria in North Tulsa in that shopping center that was Northland or Northgate or whatever it was, called Borden's. I remember I had my kids, Don and Sherry, and I had them by hand and my husband was saying, "I don't think you need to be out there in them streets doing that. You're going to kill our kids, and you know, you shouldn't do this."

So anyway, when all that stuff came to pass, and you were able to go to Borden's, we went there for dinner. My son started crying, and I said, "What are you crying about?"

He said, "Well, were we marching in the street for these mashed potatoes? Because they're horrible." [both laughing]

JE: So they let blacks in then?

MH: Yes.

JE: And of course, we know the story of Clara Luper who started that in Oklahoma City.

MH: Yes, yes, right.

JE: But then there were sit-in demonstrations in Tulsa too.

MH: Right. Yes.

JE: What advice do you give for women who are considering running for political office?

MH: Well, first and foremost, is really be relentless, in terms of what you're running for. And be resilient. And have thick skin. Be able to withstand criticism, however it may come your way. And I would say read.

I was listening to Elijah Cumming's widow this morning. And I was so struck by the fact that she had to almost kind of remind people, "Hey, I worked side by side with Elijah. I mean, I really had my own thing going as well." You know, she's stepping out and going to run for the seat.

But I think when you have a passion, and I think that would be first and foremost, your passion. The reason I came was because I wanted to see a change in education. I didn't like what happened to the teachers. God knows that they are the most underpaid.

And I admire the professor who was at Booker T. who decided, "I'm going to get in and try to make a change." His spring is stretched to the table and don't give up. Some of that stuff, it won't bring it up in committee.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

MH: They're not going to bring it up. You get on the floor, you think you have the votes, and then you don't. You know, they're, "Well, I forgot to tell you that I was talking to my people back home and they didn't like this bill."

So you've got to be prepared for whatever may be thrown your way. But never give up on your passion. Because if you're trying to make a change and you feel strongly about I think you will eventually achieve that goal. And I say, "Keep your eye on the prize and stay focused."

JE: Yeah. Your son came in here, a handsome young man, well-dressed. I would imagine he knows he's able to conduct business in town because of people like you and olders who went before him. You have certainly let him know and taught him that, right?

MH: Absolutely.

JE: Right.

MH: Absolutely. And even with my grandson, Corey, my thing is, and as I've said to my daughter as well, I said, "If I can open a door for you, I will. But you've got to be able to walk through that door and carry it yourself."

JE: Yeah.

MH: So whatever you're going to be about, you've got to make it happen. You can't rest on the fact that my mom is this, or my dad is this. But if mom or dad can open that door for you, then you've got to be able to walk through it and carry that torch on.

JE: Yeah. You had doors opened and you walked through them and you were very successful. So how would you like to be remembered?

MH: I think most and foremost that I would say that, "A very loyal, trustworthy person." That's the way that I would want to be remembered.

JE: Yeah, I think we all would like to be. I so want to check your driver's license.

MH: [laughing]

JE: To see that you are eighty-seven years old.

MH: I am.

JE: That's just so hard to believe. Were there long-livers in your family?

MH: Absolutely not. My two siblings, the ones in California because Chuck is younger, but even he, we have all three lived past our mom and dad. My mom was sixty-plus.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

MH: My dad was seventy-plus when he passed. And then some of my mom's siblings were young as well. So we laugh and talk about it. I said, "Well, some mornings you just sit there for a while and you don't know what pain's going to come your way. But just wait a minute, you'll get it." [laughs]

JE: You're right [laughs]. People then ask you, "Well, how did you live to this age?" Are you able to answer that question?

MH: Well, I think being in a happy place and not having pity parties and those kinds of things, and trying to surround yourself with positive people. I kind of run from negative, not kinda, I do run from negative environments and I don't want to be a part of that.

It's the same thing with TV. If this is all theater today like the hearings yesterday, I think, *I'm going to put on music. I just don't think I want to hear you guys go through all of that.* You know?

JE: Yeah. Yeah.

MH: I don't want to hear this stuff because I know later on I'll get the recaps—

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

MH: . . . and I'll find out some of the stuff that you were saying. And I know that we're in a very divisive time. I've even at this point started just trying to shake my head and laugh. You know, for a while there I was just angry and you just say, "What is going on with our country? And how embarrassing our national people are acting and governing." But I've tried to turn away and look at something positive. Even *Ellen*.

JE: *Ellen DeGeneres* is who.

MH: Yes. And I love comedy, certain kinds of comedy now, where you can laugh. I think that's another thing is just to live, love, and laugh.

JE: So be on the positive side. And the rest of it we don't know. I mean—

MH: Right.

JE: . . . your genes and good health, so—

MH: Right, and I just say, "A day at a time." Every morning, I just thank God, I said, "I thank you for this day because I'm alive and I'm still on this planet."

JE: You got to live this long.

MH: Yes. Absolutely.

JE: Well, I consider it a privilege that I got to meet you in person.

MH: Oh.

- JE:** And talk to you.
- MH:** Well, I've listened to you all through the years.
- JE:** Yeah.
- MH:** Always in the car. Of course, I know your lovely wife.
- JE:** Margaret, yeah.
- MH:** Yes. In fact, I remember Margaret when I think I was trying to get one of my kids before she went into—
- JE:** The lobbying.
- MH:** . . . the lobbying when she was at the Mayo Demonstration School. She helped me with getting my kids in that school.
- JE:** Yeah.
- MH:** Here again, I go back to education.
- JE:** Yeah.
- MH:** So you know where my heart is. [laughing]
- JE:** Absolutely. We're glad it was.
Thank you.
- MH:** Okay.
- JE:** This was fun, Maxine.
- MH:** Okay.
- JE:** I enjoyed it very much.
- MH:** Well, thanks, and I enjoyed it myself.

Chapter 16 - 0:33

Conclusion

Announcer: This oral history presentation is made possible through the support of our generous foundation-funders. We encourage you to join them by making your donation, which will allow us to record future stories. Students, teachers, and librarians are using this website for research and the general public is listening every day to these great Oklahomans share their life experience.

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