

## Alex Adwan

As a life-long journalist he influenced education and integration in the state of Oklahoma.

### Chapter 01 - 1:35

#### Introduction

---

Announcer: It was at the Oklahoma Military Academy in Claremore that Alex Adwan got his start in journalism. He was the editor of OMA's *Guidon* newspaper and the *Vedette* yearbook in the mid-40s.

Alex attended both high school and junior college at OMA. He graduated from junior college in 1948, and continued his journalism studies at the University of Oklahoma.

After graduating from OU in 1950, he served as a tank platoon leader in the 45th Division in Korea. He was awarded the Bronze Star with "V."

After his military service, Alex returned home to work at small daily newspapers—the *Seminole Producer*, *Wewoka Times*, and *Pauls Valley Daily Democrat*. He became co-publisher and managing editor of the *Seminole Producer*.

From 1960 to 1967, Alex was with United Press International, serving as a bureau manager in Tulsa, Houston, and Oklahoma City. He covered Houston's new space center in the early 1960s, reporting on the last of the one-man orbital space missions and the beginnings of Project Apollo, the program to send astronauts to the moon.

He joined the *Tulsa World* as Washington correspondent in 1967, and became associate editor in 1972 and editor of editorial pages in 1981.

On his retirement as editorial page editor in 1994, Alex was named senior editor.

Among many distinguished honors, Alex was named to the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame in 1991.

Listen to Alex Adwan tell his story, which includes his insight into politics and his support of public education. And made available through the oral history website [VoicesofOklahoma.com](http://VoicesofOklahoma.com).

**Chapter 02 - 5:45****Adwans Were Merchants**

---

**John Erling:** My name is John Erling. Today's date is May 4, 2010. Alex, state your full name, your age, and your date of birth.

**Alex Adwan:** I'm Alex K. Adwan. I was born April 14, 1930, in Maud, Oklahoma.

**JE:** Let's talk about your mother, her name, maiden name, where she was born, where she grew up.

**AA:** My mother's name was Lois Harkey. She graduated from high school in Tuskahoma in the late 1920s. That's down in the Kiamichi Mountain country in southeastern Oklahoma. With her parents, she moved to Maud shortly after graduation and met my father there. They worked in a department store.

**JE:** And your father's name?

**AA:** His name was Fred Adwan. He was born on a farm in what is present-day Jackson County, part of Texas in Greer County in southwestern Oklahoma at that time. His parents were Orthodox Christian immigrants from Lebanon.

My grandfather, my dad's father, came to the United States in the late 1890s, and worked his way to Oklahoma, as a peddler, and might have been a good model for Ado Annie's boyfriend in the musical *Oklahoma!* He worked a year or so to save enough money to pay for the passage of his family to this country. Then when they came here, they had three children in this country, and my father was one of those.

**JE:** And then your mother, did they come from—

**AA:** My maternal grandfather was Louis Harkey. He was an amiable farmer, carpenter, beekeeper, dairyman, of German and Scotch-Irish descent. My maternal grandmother, Lola Lawson, was a serious-minded and devout Methodist school teacher and a prohibitionist. She was the first person to suggest that I might become a writer or a journalist.

**JE:** At what age? A very young age?

**AA:** At very young in grade school and a child.

**JE:** What did your father do for a living?

**AA:** He had spent his youth as what I call a "boomer." He went to various boom towns including Healdton, Cromwell, Ranger, Texas, and a short time maybe in Mineral Wells, and wound up in Maud in 1929. Part of the time he worked with his brother, and part of the time he traveled with a Lebanese merchant named Frank Kamassid, who ran department stores and found locations in these boom towns. Moved in to stock the goods and when the boom began to let up he moved on to another town. And Dad just went with him as a teenager and traveled around as his helper.

**JE:** So they were salesmen?

**AA:** Right.

**JE:** Selling goods to stores?

**AA:** No, he operated what amounted to, I always called it a dry goods store, almost on wheels because he didn't stay at any of these places after the oil play died down. There are a lot of people like that. Frank made a lot of money in the oil business too during those years and my dad was just a kid and he helped him.

**JE:** So then, your father and mother met there?

**AA:** They met in Frank Kamassid's department store where they both worked in Maud. And then Frank helped them open a little grocery store, what would be called a convenience store today, in Maud. And they lived in the backend of that and they were living there when I was born.

**JE:** What was the name of that store?

**AA:** It was probably just called Adwan's Grocery, or something, if it had a name. They didn't stay there long.

I had a sister, she was born four years after I was. By then my dad had another grocery store, Modern Grocery on Main Street in Maud. Maud was still a sizeable town then, although the boom had started to taper off. And then he finally wound up with a large store there called Adwan's General Merchandise, and he had a grocery store, a department store, and a Frigidaire appliance franchise there. So he moved to Seminole later.

**JE:** What are your earliest recollections of your father and mother in a store and where was that?

**AA:** I remember a modern grocery and market store, the second one. I don't remember the little store at the time I was born. During those years up until the time of World War II my dad also had an interest in stores in Wewoka and St. Louis, Oklahoma, later. But now he's in Maud and I'm just a little kid and I had a great childhood there.

My grandfather had a farm on the edge of town, spent a lot of time with him.

**JE:** Do you remember working in the store?

**AA:** I spent a lot of time in the store, I remember that. In those early days, my dad sold groceries on credit. The Depression was getting under way. We didn't have a really hard-time story to tell about that, we were doing fine. But I do remember my mother and dad talking about the note at the bank was always a problem. And trying to buy stock of goods and sell it in time to meet the note and everything, but they did very well.

**JE:** Did they talk about those who would come to the store who didn't really have any money and they extended credit?

**AA:** They extended credit and you'd think in the Depression times that that would not be a very good thing to do. But actually, he always said he did very well at it, people paid their

bills. When they couldn't, some of them came back and some of them actually years later looked him up to pay off a bill that they had run up there and just weren't able to pay.

Also, in the oil fields a lot of oil operators operated what they call a "poor boy method." They didn't pay their help on time all the time, but they would go buy groceries. One time remembered a head of what became a very large and important drilling company coming in and paying the bill of half a dozen of his employees in there. He hadn't been able to pay them earlier.

**JE:** We're talking about 1929, 1930, '31, in there, in that era.

## Chapter 03 - 4:00

### Education

---

**John Erling:** You went to elementary school then in Maud?

**Alex Adwan:** Uh-huh (affirmative).

**JE:** What are your recollections?

**AA:** I had a lot of good teachers and I remember especially Miss Bessie Lee Harris. She was the principal there and taught sixth grade. I was kind of teacher's pet. She got me interested, believe it or not, in politics and the important things in civics, in other words.

**JE:** So that teacher planted the seed?

**AA:** She did help do that. My grandmother was a teacher and she talked a lot about important things. So I was introduced to pretty serious business at a pretty tender age, I guess.

**JE:** Then you went on to junior high?

**AA:** I skipped the seventh grade and went into the eighth grade. And then from there I went to Oklahoma Military Academy. That was in 1944.

**JE:** Why did you go to the Military Academy?

**AA:** Well, partly because my dad had lost a brother in World War I, his name was Alex K. Adwan, and I was given his name. He was killed at the end of the war, as a matter of fact, his family was notified that he had been wounded toward the end of September. And then they didn't learn that he had died in a hospital until after the Armistice, November the 11th.

So my dad was concerned about a fourteen-year-old boy who was going to be maybe drafted into the army, and he's wanting me to have a commission and be an officer at least if I was going to go in the army. I think that was part of his thinking. And then he wanted me to just see a little bit more of the world, I guess, then I was seeing there in Maud.

**JE:** So at the age of fourteen, you went away to the Oklahoma Military Academy in Claremore.

**AA:** Uh-huh (affirmative).

**JE:** What kind of an experience was that for you?

**AA:** Well, it was a military academy. There was no hazing in the physical sense, but for practical purposes we were made to stand with our knees bent and our arms out in front of us for long periods of time and it was rough the first semester. But I came to like the place. I go to these reunions now and we look back on those days and I'd say, "How can anybody feel any affection or have any good memory of a place that was so much like a prison?" But we did like it. I did pretty well there and I was editor of the school newspaper, the *Guidon*. And one year was editor of the *Vedette*, the yearbook. Got a kind of start in journalism there.

**JE:** When was the seat of writing planted and how old were you then?

**AA:** I can't remember all the details of this but my grandmother wrote a little poem and she had it published in the local paper there at Maud.

**JE:** And you would have been how old?

**AA:** I would have been maybe nine years old or so, or maybe less than that, a little kid. Then she stayed with that and said, "You need to be a writer." So I guess even when I got to OMA I kind of had in mind that I wanted to be a writer or maybe a newspaper man or something.

**JE:** Then when you just stated you became editor of the paper that was something you obviously volunteered for.

**AA:** Yes.

**JE:** And said, "I can do it." But it was your first foray into writing?

**AA:** Yeah. I loved OMA. Actually, the last year I was there I accumulated at one time the highest number of demerits that had ever been issued without being kicked out of school.

**JE:** All right, what were you doing?

**AA:** Well, I had a friend and he had a car and left and came to Tulsa, that was against the rules. And got back in two hours later, early in the morning actually, and there was a TAC officer waiting for us when we got there. So it was not an offense of moral turpitude, but taken quite seriously by the commandant. I lived through that and graduated from high school there in 1946, and from junior college in 1948.

**JE:** Where was junior college?

**AA:** Junior college was at OMA.

**JE:** Oh?

**AA:** High school and junior college at that time. Then I went from OMA to University of Oklahoma School of Journalism.

**JE:** You were already on your track to be a writer.

**AA:** Um-hmm, um-hmm (affirmatives).

**JE:** And to work for a newspaper and that was your goal, right?

**AA:** Right.

---

**Chapter 04 - 10:10****War Years**

---

**John Erling:** Do you remember in Maud as a youngster what you might have done for entertainment or songs or music or movie stars, as you were growing up?

**Alex Adwan:** Yeah, it was during the war. I was eleven when the war started.

**JE:** We're talking about World War II?

**AA:** World War II.

**JE:** And December 7th of 1941?

**AA:** Right. I was eleven. By the way, I mentioned Mrs. Harris, the principal, she took every kid in the grade school there and I guess certainly in the upper grades into the cafeteria to listen to Churchill's speech at the beginning of the Battle for Britain. I remember that vividly. I learned later that it was a recording, and of course, it was a rebroadcast because it was during business hours in this part of the world, but it was very moving. And I was old enough in 1939, to know what he was talking about. That Churchill speech was in 1940, when the Battle for Britain started.

And then, in 1941, after Pearl Harbor, Mrs. Harris had everybody in the auditorium to hear President Roosevelt make the Day of Infamy speech. I remember that very vividly at the age of eleven.

**JE:** A—you were so young it was probably hard to understand what it all meant but you do remember the speech?

**AA:** I do remember it and I did have a very good idea of what it meant and had had that explained to me by people who knew. Then I spent time in my dad's store and listened to people talk about it. The World War I veterans would come in and they would talk about it.

I remember when they invaded Poland, one of these old veterans said, "Well, they don't know what they're in for these Germans." He said, "When they run into that Polish cavalry this will all be over." That was a World War I idea.

**JE:** Do you remember men from your area that when the war broke out they began to volunteer?

**AA:** Oh yes. My aunt was secretary of the draft board, so I talked to her from time to time.

Anyway, yes I do remember talking to people about that and especially to some of these veterans of World War I.

**JE:** Because there was a discussion prior to December 7, '41, whether the United States should even enter the war at all.

**AA:** Yes. And I learned a little bit about that in school and I just have vague memories of it. But teachers in the upper grades of grade school anyway, that is fifth and sixth grade, they talked about that. And I certainly knew who Hitler was and what was going on.

**JE:** During the war you were eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen.

**AA:** Yeah.

**JE:** You were fourteen when you went to Oklahoma Military Academy.

**AA:** Right.

**JE:** In 1944, and the war wasn't over yet, so you didn't know how long this war was going to go on. And all those thoughts had to be running through your head.

**AA:** That's right. We had horse cavalry there at OMA, so we were training for a modern war with horses. Of course, we understood that that was not going to be the way that war was fought or was being fought. This was 1944, but we still had the horses and we still did the cavalry drills. We'd have a maneuver every Saturday, a problem, we called it. And the enemy is coming from here and we're defending this. More than once the solution to the problem would be to have a cavalry charge with our horses. We had about ninety of them, enough for a company, and we'd line up one company and they would charge across the landscape there. Very unrealistic, but someone made the point it worked because a lot of these fellows went from OMA into the army and a lot of them, by the way, were lost, but a lot of them did very well in the army.

**JE:** There was no point then in you going into the army because the war was over as you were graduated from junior college in '48. Then it was just a natural progression to further your education.

**AA:** Exactly. So I went to OU. I had finished all my ROTC qualifications. I graduated from OU in 1950, and guess what happened? I graduated in January, and in June a war started, so my dad's fear of my being called into the military came to pass only just a few years later. So I wind up in the army in 1950.

**JE:** And the war you're talking about is the Korean War.

**AA:** Korean War.

**JE:** You spent two years in the army, did you then?

**AA:** I did.

**JE:** So right out of OU?

**AA:** Right out of OU. I had gotten a job at the *Seminole Producer*, my hometown paper. I'd been working there as a student at OU and I knew the people there. In fact, one summer, it may have been the summer of '49, I don't know, I was at the ballgame. They had the Center State League in those days and I was at the ballpark. And the publisher of the *Producer*, Milt Philips called me over and said, "I see you around the office a lot and you're working with us. If you'll come by my desk tomorrow I'll put you on the payroll. You might as well work with us this summer."

And so, I worked summers there and weekends as a student. And then when I got out of school I went to work immediately.

**JE:** So then how long were you able to work before you had to join the army?

**AA:** The war started in June and I went in the army in October, so I worked about ten months, maybe.

**JE:** Right. Your experience there with the Korean War, where did you serve? Who did you serve with? What battalion?

**AA:** I went at first to Fort Sam Houston and they sent me to Camp Polk, Louisiana, to the station compliment there, the housekeeping unit that ran the post. The 45th Division Oklahoma National Guard had been mobilized in September and they had just arrived there. So I immediately started at first to get transferred into the 45th. I wanted to go into the reconnaissance company because it was from Claremore and a lot of my friends from school and people I knew who were in the company. And they had a recruiting model, which hit me, is "Go with the men you know." So I was going to go with the men and I knew, and I did get the transfer but I was assigned to the tank battalion instead of the reconnaissance company. And that's where I spent the rest of the war. I was a tank platoon leader, second lieutenant.

**JE:** You came in, you were commissioned.

**AA:** I had been commissioned after graduation from OU.

**JE:** And all that training that your father wanted you to have paid off handsomely for you.

**AA:** Well, it did. I'm not sure being a second lieutenant was a great advantage in World War II or Korea, but it wasn't a disadvantage either. So I went to Camp Polk, got in the 45th, we trained there, and then we went to Japan. That was a great adventure for me, I hadn't been around the world very much from Maud.

We left New Orleans and went through the Panama Canal. We stopped briefly on the West Coast at San Francisco and then on to the west side of Japan, in Okido, that's a northernmost island, and trained there.

One day, by this time it was 1951, General Ridgeway came down from Tokyo to inspect the 45th. He inspected it, we turned out on the airport runway there to greet him, quite a big deal. I remember it because the great man came to my platoon on this inspection and stopped and talked to one of my tank commanders, Sergeant Anderson, and he asked him, "How many tanks do you have in service in this company? And how many are on deadline and out of operation?"

Anderson says, "Well, I don't know exactly, sir, but we keep as many as we can in service because we can't get parts. But if we have one that we need a part we take it from one of the other tanks that's out of service and keep as many as we can in service."

Well, it happens that that's called cannibalism and it's a great sin in the army. Everybody does it, taking parts from one vehicle and putting it in another. So Ridgeway was very upset with this and chewed everybody out.

**JE:** Did General Ridgeway immediately have a comment to Anderson?

**AA:** No, he didn't, he didn't argue with Anderson. He was very kind to Anderson. He started with the commanding general of the 45th and that worked its way back down to me.

**JE:** So Anderson outed them?

**AA:** Well, Anderson probably, he got off lighter than anybody because everybody knew what he was trying to do and no one was going to make too much trouble for him.

**JE:** Yeah.

**AA:** Anyway, pardon me, a war story, but—

**JE:** Yeah, that's what we want those war stories.

**AA:** But the upshot of Ridgeway's visit was that the 45th had completed its training there, the final cycle of training and it was a perfectly trained division, ready for service in the field, fully equipped. He decided that there was no reason for this division to sit there with exhausted troops, some of them in pretty bad shape in Korea. So he sent the 45th to Korea to relieve the 1st Cavalry Division, which was, I suppose, still recovering from the horrible experiences of the previous year, the battles up along the Yalu and the withdrawal back into Seoul. So that's how we got to Korea.

We got there on New Year's Eve, 1951, and went into Inchon Harbor. Our first view of that was a little island called Wamido, which looked like a bald head with a few hairs sticking up on the back side. It had been covered with trees but they were completely taken off of there by artillery from the seaward side. And then a few stumps sticking up at the back. That was the first thing they took at Inchon. So this was our first look at it.

## Chapter 05 - 10:45

### Korea

---

**John Erling:** So then you were a tank platoon leader. What was your first engagement? What was your first job then once you became involved in Korea?

**Alex Adwan:** We went up and relieved the 1st Cavalry Division. But our battalion was assigned to the 1st Division of the Republic Korea, the South Korean Army, to help support them because they didn't have any tanks. And our own division had other tanks. Every regiment had its own tank company. So we wound up the tank battalion supporting Korean troops.

We went into a line there near Cheorwon, which is remembered as the old town that was shot to pieces and the Americans lost it in the first stages of the war and General Dean, division commander, was captured there.

Then my platoon rotated with other platoons in various places along the line and we went up along the Inchon River. South Korean troops were defending this and we supported them. These tanks were dug in and we had bunkers behind them to live in. It was more like World War I than anything anybody had seen in World War II. The line had been stable for a long time. Bunkers were built of logs and sandbags and dug in, the enemy the same.

We sat there and looked at one another most of the time and if we saw something to shoot at we'd shoot at it, if we didn't, sometimes we'd just try to break up a bunker. The enemy had artillery, he had tanks, but he never brought them out in the daylight. We had air superiority. But he had deadly mortars, they could operate those in daylight because they could conceal them. And that was probably the worst thing. That and mines bothered us.

Task Force Hobart was our first offensive operation where we went out of our own lines and into enemy territory. That was just a big reconnaissance in force, I never did know what the purpose of it was unless it was just to capture prisoners. Always a demand for prisoners. The Intelligence people wanted to be able to keep up with who is in front of us there and identify units. Order of battle, they call it. That was called Task Force Hobart, named for the hometown of Company C, which was headquartered in Hobart before it was mobilized.

**JE:** Hmm (thoughtful sound).

**AA:** And that was my company. That was the first time we ever got out of our main line there and went forward into enemy territory. We didn't suffer any casualties in that, it was considered a success, and I wrote a piece about it for the 45th Division News. And almost got court-martialed because since they asked me to write it I thought it was all right and that it was approved. But I found out afterward that I should have checked with my own commanding officer and my own battalion commander in the 45th Division before I published anything like that. And they were pretty upset about it, but nothing came of it.

**JE:** Were they upset because you did it or you gave away information?

**AA:** Well, both, it was against the rules, for one thing. And also, it gives the enemy too much information. It's got a number of hills in it and identification of places and everything and it did provoke the enemy to mention the thing and it came him some information to use on his propaganda radio, the English language radio broadcast that they had up there.

**JE:** So you knew they were taking information from your story?

**AA:** Yes, they knew who we were so they mentioned us in particular. This is what really bothered the brass, they don't want to give the enemy the name of a unit or identify anything that they don't have to.

**JE:** Were you talked to directly about this?

**AA:** Yes and—

**JE:** And how did it make you feel?

**AA:** My battalion commander just chewed me out about it real good and said, “Don’t ever do this again.”

And of course, I didn’t, but that was my one experience as a war correspondent. I came out of it all right. The colonel was very decent about it.

**JE:** Somewhere in there you received the Bronze Star with V for action. What was that about?

**AA:** Well, that was in the first week of July of ’52. First ROK, ROK Division was designed to take actually seven fortified places out there on high ground in front of our line that they wanted to have when the war came to an end. Remember, the Pan Moon Jon peace talks were going on at this time and both sides were scrambling to get the high ground that they wanted to occupy if they had a settlement.

So the South Korean infantry attacked this area out there and I was the commander of the tank support unit that went with them. I had my platoon and another platoon, ten tanks, and we went out there. This is high ground, mountains, really, that just crop up out of the plain there. And these infantrymen would try to struggle up there and get into these enemy trenches and bunkers and get control of the mountaintops.

And we’re down below, firing at targets on top that we can see without hitting our own men. That lasted all day and into the evening. And then late in the day we just got orders to pull back. It didn’t have all the objectives but they just quit.

Meanwhile, my tank, the track had come off of it. We were trying to turn around with mines on both sides of us and it just pulled it loose, so I had to be towed out of there. And I had to help put the track back on. We couldn’t get it on where it would work, but we did get it on where we could tow the tank easily.

The interesting thing was I’d been told a few days earlier that I was going to leave, that my time was up and I could go home. Rotate, they call it. Then they came back just a few hours later and the adjunct says, “I’m sorry, but you can’t go back because it’s operations on and you’re the only one who’s done the reconnaissance and the work on it and you’re going to have to go out there.”

So I said, “Okay.”

**JE:** Well, it was more than an okay, what a let-down that was for you, wasn’t it?

**AA:** What a let-down. I’d written my folks and told them I’m coming home.

**JE:** So now in ’52 you are?

**AA:** Twenty-two.

**JE:** So then you had to stay?

**AA:** I had to stay for this. That worked out all right. So then I came home the day after that, but I didn’t have time to watch these big other operations on this big offensive, watched the 45th from a distance open up with their guns to try to get some of this high ground on their front. I remember we were enjoining them with the South Korean troops and I was

told at the time that it was the biggest artillery barrage that had been fired up to that time. They had brought in trucks from other units in order to haul in ammunition. They set up service stations, including tire-changing places to serve these trucks to haul shells to these guns. They fired everything that you could think of at the Chinese for, oh I don't know, it seemed to me like for hours.

I never really knew how all that came out, that was my memory of action in Korea.

**JE:** I remember as a youngster hearing about the Korean War. It was always about the 38th Parallel.

**AA:** Uh-huh (affirmative).

**JE:** Talk to us about that.

**AA:** That was the dividing line informally agreed upon between the United States and Soviet Union for who would occupy Korea, which had previously been occupied by the Japanese. And then the government of North Korea talked to Stalin into supporting an attack on South Korea. We had advisors there, it was not formally a part of our occupied territory by treaty or anything like Japan or Germany, but we were just there with advisors to the South Korean army. This was a kind of a surprise attack. Since it was supported by Stalin, President Truman felt we didn't have any choice but to try to stop them and turn them around. So he just told about it, he says, "Well, you'll have to stop the so-and-so's and that's all there is to it." That was the order they had.

In the long run, we did stop them and South Korea became, as everybody knows, a model democracy and an industrial giant in many ways. And North Korea remained, and remains today, one of the most backward, dangerous places on earth, I guess.

**JE:** General Eisenhower made a presence there in the Korean War.

**AA:** Yes.

**JE:** What are your recollections of him?

**AA:** Well, he campaigned on the promise that if elected he would go to Korea. And he didn't say what he would do there or how he intended to end the war. But just the fact that he was Eisenhower, that was good enough for the public. So he was elected, and he was President Elect, he had made this promise, and he went to Korea and visited there very briefly. He went up to the front and looked at things and then he came back. He had concluded probably before he went that it was hopeless to try to win a war there and to enlarge a war with China.

We had a rule, an ironclad part of doctrine and in those days it was, "Don't get in a land war with the continent of Asia." We'd already been in one out there in the Pacific with Japan, and to a certain extent in China.

So we pulled back to the 38th Parallel. We already were on the 38th Parallel, more or less, and we decided just to stay there. And we opened up negotiations.

And one time while I was there we even had a unilateral cease-fire. We just ceased fire and ceased all offensive operations along our front. That must have been April of '52, to see how the enemy would react. And maybe we could just work out, it had been done before, a de facto truce, no papers signed or anything. But that didn't work. After about ten or fifteen days we had to go back in business.

**JE:** So you were hoping during that time, of course, that maybe they'll get the message.

**AA:** Well, if they had just pulled back like we did and ceased fire, but they made it a point to maintain enough hostile patrolling activity and occasional fire to say to us, "We're not going to buy this, we want a better deal."

Admiral Turner Joy, who was in charge of Penman John, our chief negotiator, said, "One reason we had to worry about places like Pork Chop Hill and some of these other places we were fighting over, over there during this period was not just the military value, but we have to show the Chinese that we can bleed as well as they can." I've often thought about that.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

## Chapter 06 - 3:45

### Home from the War

---

**John Erling:** You leave the military in 1952.

**Alex Adwan:** Nineteen fifty-two, I came home.

**JE:** And the war is over.

**AA:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** And you came home and then what did you do?

**AA:** When I came home I went to work for the *Seminole Producer* where I had just left. In the meantime, my bosses, the Philips Brothers of Seminole and Holdenville had bought the *Wewoka Times*, so I worked as a reporter covering the courthouse in Wewoka and something there in Seminole for both papers. We had a wire service where we could communicate. That was an important time in my life because at that time the Philips Brothers, who were very successful publishers and very well-known and influential people in Oklahoma at that time, had great ambitions to buy other newspapers and create smaller newspapers and create central printing operations using wire to transfer stuff just like the big papers, like the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times* do now.

Of course, I have a large stake in this and they both tell me, "If you'll just stick with us we're going to buy other papers."

And then Tom died unexpectedly at the age of about fifty-three maybe or so, and that ended that. Then Milt said, "I don't want to go on with anything else."

So I stayed there in Seminole for awhile. He sold me a small interest in it and I became Associate Publisher and Managing Editor. That's what I was doing when I went to work for UPI.

**JE:** In 1960—

**AA:** Nineteen sixty.

**JE:** ...you joined UPI.

**AA:** Yeah.

**JE:** United Press International.

**AA:** Yeah.

**JE:** And you were a bureau manager in Tulsa.

**AA:** Yes.

**JE:** But then you had some interest in those newspapers.

**AA:** I had sold my interest back to Milt at that time and I didn't have any interest in that. He made it clear that as far as any kind of growth there that he wouldn't do it. Well, his son Ted, and my other partner, Terrell Science, who was the production superintendent, we didn't have credit. We might have gone on with it, but it's not the same as people with an already established line of credit. They could have bought any newspaper just with a phone call to the bank. We couldn't do that.

**JE:** Now you're in Tulsa in 1960. Somewhere along the line you met a woman by the name of Teresa?

**AA:** The two things are connected, my coming to work for UPI. Her father, Carter Bradley was a long time state manager for United Press International in Oklahoma City. When I worked at *Seminole* we woke in for a short time at Paul's Valley. I was his correspondent, it's called a "Stringer," and they paid me by word for getting a little information to them. So when Carter Bradley went to work for Senator Bob Kerr, that created an opening in UPI, not his job, but it created an opening in Tulsa. And Carter suggested that I go to take that job and he got that done for me, as far as UPI was concerned. And that's how I got here.

Well, he had a daughter named Teresa. She's quite a few years younger than I am and I knew her, And Carter and his wife, Loretta, they were very good friends of mine through those years. So then I went to work for UPI, but Teresa, in the meantime, is going to college during those years and I haven't seen her. That comes later when I get to Washington.

**JE:** Okay, so the two of you got to know each other but that was it.

**AA:** That was it.

**JE:** At that point.

**AA:** Right.

**JE:** In 1960, in there.

**AA:** Yeah, as I say, she was a high school kid when I went to the 1960 convention with Carter, the 1960 Democratic convention when Kennedy was nominated, which was another highlight of my journalistic career.

## Chapter 07 - 6:20

### Houston

---

**John Erling:** You went to Houston.

**Alex Adwan:** Yeah, I went to Houston from Tulsa. That was at a time when they were establishing a space center down there. They had just gotten big league football and baseball was still new there, and it was a very exciting time.

**JE:** And one of the things you covered there was the last of the one-man Mercury space flights.

**AA:** Right. My first day I walked in the bureau, I had to cover a news conference in which they released the after-operations report on Carpenter's orbital flight. UPI keeps score, they did on which papers used which wire service on everything, and I did very well on that. And that got me off to a good start, I got a lot of play with it.

**JE:** The last of the one-man Mercury space flight, the last flight, as I understand, was with L. Gordon Cooper.

**AA:** Right.

**JE:** That was the first US manned-flight to last an entire day.

**AA:** Yeah.

**JE:** You covered that.

**AA:** Yes. Actually I covered, if I remember right, I was in Oklahoma, actually, I wound up in Oklahoma because I remembered on Cooper's flight I was at his mother's house over near Tecumseh.

**JE:** How is it that you were at his mother's house?

**AA:** Well, I was working for UPI, but not at the Houston bureau. We covered the families of all of these and that's what I did at Houston. The Schirra flight is the that I remember from Houston because I had a telephone in a tree, they had installed in a tree in his neighbor's yard across from his—

**JE:** From Wally Schirra's house.

**AA:** Yeah. It was kind of one of these watch things where you hope you don't have any news. What you want is for everything to go well and you don't have to worry about getting too much reaction. And then when the flights over, then you interview the families.

**JE:** We might mention here for the record that Wally Schirra was of the original seven astronauts: Scott Carpenter, John Glenn—

**AA:** Right.

**JE:** ...Gus Grissom, Deke Slayton, Alan Shephard, Gordon Cooper, and Wally Schirra.

**AA:** Right.

**JE:** Did you ever interview any of the astronauts?

**AA:** Well, I met some of them and talked to them, asked questions at press conferences.

**JE:** But then you talked to some of their families?

**AA:** Yeah, their families. I think there was one Mercury flight and one Gemini flight during that period, but you can look there and see. But one of the flights I covered from Oklahoma City, and that was to go to Cooper's house.

**JE:** And first of the two-man Gemini flights you were covering. Project Gemini was the second human space flight program.

**AA:** Uh-huh (affirmative).

**JE:** Which operated between Projects Mercury and Apollo.

**AA:** Hmm (thoughtful sound).

**JE:** Which was all leading, of course, to land humans on the moon.

**AA:** Right. The most important thing that happened down there while I was there was that President Kennedy came down to repeat his announcement that he had made in Washington a day earlier that we would send a man to the moon. That that had been approved and it would be done.

Now, Teresa's father, Carter Bradley, was by that time Chief Clerk of the Senate Space Committee, working for Senator Bob Kerr. And he had a lot to do with the legislation that authorized that and made it possible for Kennedy to make that nomination. So he came down to Houston from time to time and I saw him.

I remember one trip he made down there and we talked and went out and he introduced me to a lot of people out at the center, you know. At that time, I had no idea that he was going to be my father-in-law.

**JE:** Yeah.

**AA:** We were just good friends.

**JE:** Were you there then when President Kennedy came—

**AA:** Yes.

**JE:** ...and reiterated his statement—

**AA:** Yes.

**JE:** ...and you remember all that scene?

**AA:** Oh yeah, it was great. There was a stadium there full of people and Houston is nothing if not civic-minded and proud of this. And they had a huge parade and the whole works.

**JE:** So did you cover it as a—

**AA:** Oh yeah.

**JE:** And you wrote a story about—

**AA:** Yeah, Kennedy.

**JE:** ...that?

**AA:** Yeah I did most of this by phone. They had rewrite people do the story, so I get a lot of credit for really being just a legman when other people were actually doing the writing. But yes I covered that story.

**JE:** So—

**AA:** Had my byline on it.

**JE:** You would just on the phone, talk back to United Press—

**AA:** To the bureau, actually in that case, talking back to the bureau in Dallas.

**JE:** UPI in Dallas. And you were just telling them what went on?

**AA:** Right.

**JE:** Then somebody there actually wrote the story?

**AA:** Yeah, more or less.

**JE:** Did that go on a lot in the business?

**AA:** No, I should have done a better job of just dictating stories myself. I learned to do that in time. But a lot of time I depended on other people and editors. That's true of everything, as you know. I did cover it and I must have given some good information because we did very well with the story. And I have a thing from New York, that's the highest accolade you can get. If New York is happy with it all's well with the world. You know?

**JE:** So do you think your story made, let's say, into the *New York Times*?

**AA:** It made a lot of papers all over the country.

**JE:** You were the eyes and ears.

**AA:** I was the eyes and ears. And I got the byline, even though some other guy may have actually written the lead and the text that did the job.

**JE:** So did something come out of that for you professionally?

**AA:** No not directly, but it didn't hurt because that's what you're trying to do is get in the papers. Mostly what came out of that for me, I mean, this is exciting stuff, Kennedy, he's a great showman and great with the press. So he came up to the Space Center. Then later days, of course, security really got tough and so the press was blocked off and kept behind ropes. But he's walking around the Space Center and these guys are showing him this and this and this.

So a guy like me, I can just walk along behind him there and listen to everything's that said.

**JE:** Did you ask him a direct question?

**AA:** Oh no. This was a planned deal, I wouldn't want to interrupt anything there. And other guys were doing the same thing. But I'm just thinking, "I can't believe I'm here."

**JE:** But you were within a few feet of him?

**AA:** Oh yeah. He had come down there on the same errand, partly, his visits to Texas always involved trying to straighten out political problems down there. And I wrote a good story about that. Also pointing out that this wasn't all about the space program, that yet Conley—

**JE:** John Conley.

**AA:** ...was with a real conservative wing of the Democratic party. Kennedy was trying to straighten that out.

**JE:** So he and John Conley, he wanted to be closer to and fix that.

**AA:** Right, well, he wanted to keep Conley out of trouble with the people here and he'd settle quarrels.

LBJ always had some problem there too, you know, and he was trying to patch things up. Peace in the family, sort of thing.

## Chapter 08 - 3:00

### Teresa

---

**John Erling:** Then in '63, you moved to Oklahoma City.

**Alex Adwan:** Yeah, in '63, I moved back there State News Manager.

**JE:** Was that in the middle of the year? Do you remember the month of it?

**AA:** No I don't.

**JE:** Right.

**AA:** But I know I was not in Texas when the President was assassinated.

**JE:** Which would have been in November of that year.

**AA:** Right.

**JE:** But then you became a State House correspondent.

**AA:** What happened is the regular correspondent, Harry Culver, was that year president of the International Wire Service Guild. He represented all of the UPI and AP union members. And they had a grievance against us, eventually that was important, and Harry had to take a lot of time off to attend to union business. So in his absence, I would cover the capitol.

I guess the biggest story that I can remember, probably more than one, we almost had a school teacher strike during that time. But Baker versus Carr had come down. The circuit court of appeals finally ordered the Oklahoma legislature to be redistricted along the lines of one man, one vote. That was a big story.

**JE:** But then you joined the *Tulsa World* in 1967, as a Washington correspondent.

**AA:** Right.

**JE:** So you lived in Washington, DC, then, up until 1972.

**AA:** That's where I met Teresa. When I went to Washington I stayed with the Bradleys for awhile. Made arrangements to stay with them until I could get an apartment and everything. When I got there, Teresa shows up a few days later and she's in graduate work at Pittsburgh University, and she comes home.

So it's sort of a natural thing for her to help me find an apartment. She says, "Well, yeah, I helped him find it, then a few months later I moved in with him." And that's exactly what happened. Here's this Carter and Loretta, they got this beautiful daughter. I can't tell you what a happy occasion that was.

**JE:** You were how many years older than Teresa?

**AA:** About thirteen years.

**JE:** And everybody in the family was okay with the age difference?

**AA:** Oh yeah, that bothered me. I told Teresa, "You have to be all right with everybody, with your mother and dad and everything." They were all right with it.

**JE:** Eventually you got married then?

**AA:** Got married, yeah.

**JE:** How old were you when you got married?

**AA:** Thirty-seven.

**JE:** So then she was?

**AA:** She was about twenty-three, I guess.

**JE:** Twenty-three.

**AA:** Between twenty-three or twenty-four.

**JE:** What year did you get married?

**AA:** Sixty-seven.

**JE:** So that's the time that you were also coming here to the *Tulsa World*?

**AA:** That's the same year.

**JE:** That's the same year, yes.

**AA:** Yeah.

**JE:** Where were you married?

**AA:** We were married in Oklahoma City at St. Joseph's Cathedral.

**JE:** You continued then to live in Washington, DC.

**AA:** Right.

**JE:** She continued her schooling.

**AA:** Yeah.

**JE:** And then you worked as the Washington correspondent.

**AA:** Right. She actually dropped out of Pittsburgh after we got married and she came back and taught a class there at a private school until we came back to Tulsa. That was in '72, January.

## Chapter 09 - 8:45

### Integration

---

**John Erling:** Any big stories that you covered between '67 and '72 while you were in Washington?

**Alex Adwan:** I mostly covered stories involving Oklahomans. We depended on the wires for general coverage. But I had a couple of breaks.

One thing is that an Oklahoman became Speaker of the House while I was there, Carl Albert, so I covered his office and his elevation to the House and his career there, and that was important.

The other thing was that Fred Harris, although a junior senator, made a lot of news as a Democratic party figure. Humphrey's co-campaign manager was Senator Mondale in '68, and he became Democratic National Chairman after Humphrey's defeat.

**JE:** Hubert Humphrey?

**AA:** Yeah, Hubert. And the '68 Convention was a very big story. I wrote some stories that were well received by my bosses from that. Also we had a big change in the makeup of the congressional delegation with the arrival of Senator Bellmon.

**JE:** I'm going to come back to those. But then you returned to Tulsa in '72, as an associate editor.

**AA:** Uh-huh (affirmative).

**JE:** And then you were named editor of the editorial page in 1981.

**AA:** Yeah.

**JE:** And then since '94 then, you were senior editor and columnist.

**AA:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** Let's talk about some of the issues while you're back here now in Oklahoma that you took on, like racial justice or racial injustice.

**AA:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** I believe you were at OU when the school was integrated in '48 and '50.

**AA:** That's right.

**JE:** Tell us about the school before integration and then what changes you saw as integration set in.

**AA:** I worked on the *Daily*, the *Oklahoma Daily*, the student newspaper, for most of the time I was at OU those two years, but I couldn't find anything that I had actually covered or

written about. Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher or G. W. McLaurin, the two students who broke the barrier there at OU. Because I did work for the *Daily*, I talked to a lot of people about it and probably knew a lot more about it and had a lot greater interest in it than just an ordinary student would have. Because it was a subject, as you can imagine, for discussion in journalism classes in particular. And I had a very strong interest in it, as a matter of fact, very strong feelings about it.

I went over to the Education Department, I guess it was, over to the building, to see the arrangement that they had over there for G. W. McLaurin, one of the two black applicants. They had admitted him on the orders of the Supreme Court. But this brilliant state of ours had decided that even though the court said that he had to have an equal education and had to attend OU, that he would still have to be segregated, because that part of the law, they said, hadn't been decided.

So they put him in a separate enclosure out there at the back of the classroom. I wrote a story about it later and called it "The Man in the Glass Cage." He was enclosed and prohibited from sitting down with the rest of the students.

The same arrangement was made for Ada Lois Sipuel. This has outraged me and it changed my whole world view about race and civic life in general and how things are supposed to work.

**JE:** Did it outrage other journalism students?

**AA:** Sure, it outraged a lot of people and the credit, including most of all, the president of the university, George L. Cross, but he is the servant of the state of Oklahoma, and of course, has to carry out rules and laws and rulings. But he became a friend and counselor of the students, especially Ada Lois Sipuel.

And I talked to her later about all this and she said he'd told her, "Just hang in there, we'll get this straightened out," and just to be patient. And that's exactly what happened.

They went back to court, and of course, the court didn't take ten minutes to tell them, "Look, when we say we're going to give these people equal education, we mean just what we say." That's what they told them, so they had to take all that stuff down.

**JE:** So then the United States Supreme Court said, "No, we mean equal education, that means they'll be treated the same in the classroom as anybody else."

**AA:** They also had separate quarters and separate tables, marked off in the cafeteria at the Student Union.

**JE:** That—

**AA:** That of course, was thrown out too.

**JE:** So you had that in your memory bank?

**AA:** Yeah.

**JE:** Then as you moved forward in your life it was something that you did write about and editorialize about, I would imagine.

**AA:** Right.

**JE:** But then you were in the army when President Truman's integration order went into effect.

**AA:** Right.

**JE:** In 1952. [*correction for accuracy 1952*]

**AA:** Well, I had a similar experience in the army because I was in units that had not been integrated up to that time, but were integrated or were on the edge of being integrated when I was there. First at Camp Polk in the station complement there. The housekeeping unit that I belonged to got orders that they would be integrated. I heard the grumbling and everything and mumbling a little bit there from that, but I left before it happened.

Then in Japan, the 45th was integrated and our battalion started with two lieutenants. One of them was a lawyer and one was an accountant and I got acquainted with them. That went very well, everybody in our battalion were good soldiers and they just obey orders. And the other thing is they're good guys and they see it up close. They know fair play when they see it.

But what struck me about these guys, one of them in particular went into detail to tell me that he was going to try to stay in the regular army because he always wanted to be overseas. He said, "When I get through here, if I don't get an assignment in Japan, I'm going to try to go to Germany. And if not Germany, find some other place."

I said, "Why would you want to do that?"

Well, he says, "Because with the way I'll be treated when I go back to the United States, why would I want to go back there?"

Here's a guy that's up there and fixing to go fight for this country that knows that if he goes back to his own country he's going to be treated as a second-rate citizen. And this really, this really got my goat.

**JE:** Yeah. At OU when integration then became the law, did all the students on campus accept it? Or were there those who objected to it?

**AA:** There were some incidents, but in all fairness to OU, I think they were very much the exception rather than the rule. We'd have a story every once in awhile about a cross being burned or something, but mostly people were pretty decent about it. And a lot of people just weren't too interested in it.

**JE:** In the early '60s, we have Martin Luther King and his peaceful demonstrations and all. Did you have any encounter with him?

**AA:** I had one brief encounter with him that didn't amount to a hill of beans except that later on I could tell everybody that I talked to Martin Luther King. But he was going to visit Houston to talk about a drive there to get the theaters integrated. At first the business

people there, the Chamber of Commerce, said they'd like to meet with him at the Petroleum Club. These Houston civic leaders kind of wanted to make a point of showing their willingness to get this problem solved.

But then that somehow got into dispute and a kind of embarrassing situation. I never knew the exact details of it. The meeting for him was set up at Houston University and he was in, I think, Birmingham at the time, or one of the places where he had other business going.

**JE:** Selma?

**AA:** He canceled his appearance there but the meeting went on and I went out there to cover it. And he was going to address it by telephone, which he did. They had set up a phone connection and he addressed this crowd.

Then this young woman who was an emcee, I said, "If you get a chance, tell Dr. King that the UPI reporter here would like to talk to him."

She did, and he said, "Well, put him on."

So I said, "Well, I just wanted to get an idea of what's going on there."

He says, "Well, we're talking and we think maybe we're going to get something worked out or some not very newsworthy thing."

But I was able to call UPI and get a new lead written on their story, so it was very worthwhile. It wasn't a great, big story, by a long shot, probably something that he kind of said the same thing, more or less, on the scene. But it goes back to the Southland where everybody's interested in this and it's a pretty good story.

**JE:** You were getting attention here, I would imagine, in your career because it seems like you were in the right place, right time, many times.

**AA:** Sometimes I was and sometimes I'd be in the right place and not do to well. But in that case, that was a really good thing and a great memory for me.

## Chapter 10 - 3:15

### Martin Luther King

---

**Alex Adwan:** I was in Washington, of course, when he was assassinated. That evening, disorder began, you may remember, in a number of cities, including Washington. The next day I went down to the capitol to go to work as usual, and sometime during the day, I don't know, maybe around noon, things were getting out of hand in certain areas of downtown. Fires were being started, you could see the smoke from the capitol up there.

And a policeman I knew there, a sergeant in the Capitol Police said, "If you don't have any business up here, I would strongly advise you to get out of here as soon as you can." He said, "You can see what's going on and we don't know what's going to happen."

I took his advice and I called Teresa to come and pick me up and then we drove downtown to pick up her mother, who worked for the University of Oklahoma downtown at an office that OU kept up there.

**John Erling:** In Washington, DC?

**AA:** In Washington. Then we were going to drive to their home in Arlington. But by then, traffic had been stopped by disorder here and there. No great deadly violence or anything, but just people in the street and looting was starting. Very scary situation, and we were sitting at an intersection on the way home and watched a bunch of young kids, that's all they were, just kids out of school, you know, and just full of emotion and everything. And they'd go in, break into a store and start looting there. We're watching this, scary, a lot more scary than it actually was, I mean, it looked that way.

**JE:** We should point out here, this was happening in Washington, DC, when the murder actually took place in Memphis, Tennessee.

**AA:** Yes, and it happened in the following days in other places. But we finally made it home to Bradley's home in Arlington, and we stayed there then three days that this was going on. And very scary.

**JE:** But did you feel as a reporter you needed to be out covering it?

**AA:** Well, I did write some good stories about it, they were very well received by my boss, Ed Stein, and other people at the *World*. Just eyewitness accounts of things. It was really one of those great moments in time that you knew was going to change things, and it did. I look back at that.

Teresa, who stayed in Washington and was in the march, Martin Luther King's march when he made the "I Had a Dream" speech. So then she's there watching this reaction to his assassination and to his death. This was an emotional time for us, but I did write some stories about it.

**JE:** Then you wrote about the investigation.

**AA:** Yeah, about the Current Commission. Fred Harris was appointed to that. I mentioned him earlier, this is a Democratic president, of course, and Fred Harris was appointed to that commission, so that made it Oklahoma news. I covered that thing, but for the most part, it's just testimony and nothing very new about it. But then the report itself said that we had two Americas and one of them was white and one black, and one of them was all right and the other one was a disgrace. That's what it concluded.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**AA:** It was controversial, but still cited and referred to in columns and opinion pieces today.

---

**Chapter 11 - 7:30****Henry Bellmon**

---

**John Erling:** Let's talk about some of the Oklahoma people you wrote about. Former Governor Henry Bellmon, he was governor, then he was senator, then he was governor. Governor in '63 to '67, then he was senator, then he was governor from '87 to '91.

**Alex Adwan:** Yes.

**JE:** Remember any stories you may have written about?

**AA:** Yeah, I always mention that I was the temporary state house correspondent in my days at Oklahoma City. And that was after Henry Bellmon had been elected to his first term. That's where we got well acquainted. I knew him from earlier days when he was state chairman and I worked in Tulsa. But we got well acquainted because I covered his office everyday. I came to see him very early on as a straight-shooter who was going to do great things. He had a lot of characteristics, one of which was that he was a very practical-minded man and had no time for frivolities or anything like that.

The other thing about him, he was a man who learned from his own experience. He told me one time that one of the great things he got out of World War II, after fighting in Iwo Jima and Okinawa, and seeing all of that, that one of the things he learned in World War II was that the Japanese were just human beings and children of God like everybody else.

That was quite a thought, I mean—

**JE:** Yeah.

**AA:** ...this is an intelligent man who makes this observation.

And then the other thing was, he was an odd duck in modern day politics in that he was an inner-directed man who went by his own instincts of right or wrong and what he thought. Somehow he was able to do that and still function as a very smart politician. That's something else.

He cast a couple of votes in Washington that really got him into a lot of trouble. One of them was on a phony anti-busing amendment. A lot of Democrats caved in and voted for it to outlaw busing and segregation. Well, it was phony because you couldn't do it anyway, they didn't have that power to do that. The Supreme Court had already ruled that you could use buses to integrate schools. And he said, "Well, I'm just not going to vote for something that is useless like that." And that seemed to hurt him.

But later on, when he ran against Ed Edmondson, I dug up figures that I think showed that he cut into the Democratic margins in black precincts enough to win that election, when he was re-elected to the Senate.

The other one was when he voted for the Panama Canal Treaty, he was savaged for that and called a communist and everything else.

**JE:** Tell us what that was about, that treaty.

**AA:** Well, the treaty restored the canal to the sovereignty and the jurisdiction of the government of Panama. And we effectively gave up all claim to sovereignty over any of their territory, or over the canal itself. But then it had contractual arrangements for our use of it and our help in managing it and privileges for our shipping and everything.

It worked very well but it was considered to be, "Well, we're just giving away something that's ours," and that kind of stuff. Well, you know the history of the Panama Canal, we took it almost by force and it was located in the middle of another country.

I called him the day of the vote and I said, "You know, I just wanted you to get a call from somebody that's not mad at you."

He said, "Well, I don't care if anybody's mad at me." Then he got mad at me, he said, "Do you think I care?" He said, "Look, I have talked to people at the Pentagon and the Intelligence and military and everybody who knows anything about this. And I'm telling you this is the right thing to do." And that was it. That's the kind of guy he was.

**JE:** I interviewed him for VoicesofOklahoma.com. He resented the fact that President Carter tried to lobby him on that, then invited him to the White House. He rejected all that. That didn't sit well with him, I remember him saying.

**AA:** I don't remember talking to him about Carter's role in it, but it tells you something given that and the fact that Carter wasn't his kind of politician anyway, that he still voted for that against the wishes of people in his own party and the President. A Democratic and everything else, because he came to the conclusion that it was the right thing to do.

A few years later, a dictator and a dope dealer took control of Panama, and we had to deal with him for awhile. And then first President Bush sent troops down there to arrest him. The operation was a big success, the man was removed, and taken out of there and tried for criminal conduct. Panama got a respectable government in there and we've had normal relations and full use of the canal ever since.

I don't think any of that would have happened if we'd tried to hang on to the canal and claim sovereignty to it.

**JE:** Remember how he talked about how poorly the *Daily Oklahoman* treated him. So they were editorializing against that.

**AA:** Right.

**JE:** The *Tulsa World*, you were supporting him in your editorials?

**AA:** I think we did, and I know after the fact, we did and I did.

**JE:** Then in the area of education as he was governor, we had House bill 1017.

**AA:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** Which called for a 27 percent increase in funding of common schools as well as compulsory kindergarten, smaller classes, teacher-incentive pay, and teacher tenure reform. That was a huge issue in our state legislature.

**AA:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** And you wrote about that?

**AA:** Yeah.

**JE:** What was it you were writing about and were you supporting?

**AA:** Yes we were for it and backed him 100 percent because we had gotten to a point where we'd been before and it was getting worse. We were forty-seventh, I believe, in public support of education. During his first term, the teachers came within an ace of going on strike because he wasn't able to find the kind of money that they thought they needed, and he kind of fell out with the teachers at that time.

Then he came back in his second term, years later, and he decided it was time to do something about the school funding to try to get Oklahoma, if not up to the regional average, at least get it out of the backwoods, you know? This thing was worked out over a period of time. And he appointed a commission to do some planning, and then he got it through the legislature. And again, he took a lot of heat from the *Daily Oklahoman*, but also from members of his own party.

Finally, the Republicans got a petition drive because it didn't have the emergency clause on it and didn't go into effect immediately, you know how that works. And wound up having a stayed vote on whether to repeal it or not.

Well, it would have been a disaster to repeal it. And I wrote several editorials, columns, everything I could think of about that. I described it as sort of an Armageddon, as far as education was concerned.

**JE:** That was in 1990, Educational Reform and Funding Act of 1990, and became known as House bill 1017. In fact, there were Republicans from the Tulsa area that were very much opposed to this. Senator Charles Ford was one of those.

**AA:** Yeah, yeah.

**JE:** So here is Henry Bellmon fighting, as you've already said, his own party.

**AA:** Yeah. Well, it was quite a stand. There's another thing he did. A lot of people talk about being fiscally conservative, he's the original fiscal conservative. He believes in paying for anything the government is going to do. If it was worth doing, it was worth raising the taxes to do it. And if you didn't want to pay for it, then it wouldn't be worth doing. That was his view on things and he made it stick.

---

**Chapter 12 - 3:10****David Boren**

---

**John Erling:** David Boren, who was a state legislator, the governor, a senator, now president of Oklahoma University. In '67, he was elected to the Oklahoma House of Representatives, then he was elected governor in '74, when he had the Boren Broom Brigade.

**Alex Adwan:** First of all, you know I was born in Maud, and David Boren's mother's parents lived in Maud, were our neighbors when David was born. He was born in Washington, DC. So we knew the Borens and his mother's family, the McCowans, for a long, long time before David was born. So my family had a big interest in his career all along.

His father, of course, was a congressman, and there was no doubt from the time he was born that this kid was probably going to go into politics and probably for life. He was educated for it and went to Oxford. Got elected to state legislature. He was a back-bencher there, kind of at odds with the leadership, sort of a maverick. That served him well when he ran because he was able to run against the old guard, whatever that meant.

And that's when he came up with the Broom Brigade to clean out the state House and get rid of the old guard. Oddly enough, it worked. The other two principles in that race were a very popular congressman, Clint McSpadden, and an incumbent governor, David Hall.

Boren, this back-bencher from Seminole, managed to wind up winning that race. That gives you an idea of what kind of a politician he is and what you're going to see.

**JE:** Did your newspaper support him in that campaign?

**AA:** No, the *Tulsa World* did not support him. I was not the editor at that time, I was associate editor. I don't believe we supported anyone in the primary.

Jim Inhofe wound up as the Republican candidate. Inhofe had reached the conclusion that Boren was popular with a number of Democrats, conservative Democrats, and that they could help him win the general election. But David could not win the Democratic nomination, so he went around the state saying really kind things about David Boren, looking to the day when he could call on David Boren and his supporters to oppose either McSpadden or Hall, as the case may be, I believe that's right.

Well, of course, David wound up with the nomination, so he says, "Here's what Inhofe said about me, he says I'm this and that." And he says, "Jim, I'm sorry you don't like me anymore but you used to say such kind things about me." And then he'd read these things he'd said about him. He's one of the most valuable statesmen I think we've ever had. I rank him with Bellmon in that regard, and others, a few others.

He was also a super salesman, he was a politician, was able to do a number of things that didn't have anything directly to do with the government, like the establishment of the

Arts Institute at Altus, where these kids can go down there for summer classes and meet great actors and writers and musicians. And his Foundation for Excellence, which provides generous awards to outstanding teachers and the recognition of outstanding students. You can name a lot of things like that.

**JE:** Yeah.

## Chapter 13 - 2:00

### Paige Belcher

---

**John Erling:** Paige Belcher, he was Oklahoma's only Republican in Congress during much of the '50s and '60s. Some recollection of Paige Belcher.

**Alex Adwan:** Well, he was a World War I veteran and getting up in years when I was there, but he worked like a young man. He was down there every morning, early, to meet with his staff and with his colleagues in the coffee klatches, you know, and find out what's going on, and then go in. He was senior Republican on the House Agriculture Committee, which was a very powerful position in a lot of places. And he says he's always going to vote Republican. He's going to maintain his regularity, but he represents everybody. And you'd never find anybody who didn't like him.

So I admired him for a number of reasons. First of all, he was a hardworking guy, the kind that you want working for you in any job, including the Congress, even if you disagreed with him on a lot of things.

And two, he just had a sense of honor and honesty about him that you just had to admire. He loved golf, and the only time he ever called me and said, "I really got something I want to tell you about." He said, "I hit an eagle on number three out at the golf course Sunday. Big deal," he says, "that's rarely ever done."

And of course, I did a story about it. But he was so proud of it. So in that connection, one day I said, "Paige, how come you don't play golf more? You can go out there anytime you want." Some people did, you know.

He said, "I wouldn't even think about playing golf when the Congress is in session and business is going on up here. What do you think about it?"

And I thought, "Well, that's right."

Great guy, I just loved him as a guide. I worked closely with him, saw him everyday during my days up there because he was our local congressman.

**JE:** And then he was loved enough and he loved the game enough so they named the golf course after him.

**AA:** Yeah. I also had great respect, and still do, for Jim Jones, who succeeded him.

**JE:** Congressman James R.—

**AA:** An outstanding guy and a great achiever.

**JE:** Congressman James R. Jones, who was from here, this district in Tulsa.

**AA:** Uh-huh (affirmative).

**JE:** The 1st District.

**AA:** He was the first one after Paige.

## Chapter 14 - 2:27

### Raymond Gary

---

**John Erling:** Raymond Gary began his governorship in 1955.

**Alex Adwan:** Raymond Gary was a good friend of my bosses, the Philips Brothers, and I met him a time or two through them, although I had no reason to try to cover him on a regular basis. I worked at *Seminole* at that time in Pauls Valley, but he saved this state from really possibly a tragic reaction to the Brown versus Board of School Decision in 1954 because he went around and convinced people that the state of Oklahoma was going to obey this court order and had to obey it, that we were not lawless. He convinced business interests and others and politicians that we had to do that and we did, while the state of Arkansas eventually got into convulsions over it and some of the other southern states. We coasted through and got through it, thanks to Raymond Gray.

**JE:** Shortly after he was inaugurated, he gave this extemporaneous speech, believed to be one of the best speeches ever delivered before the legislature. And he focused on his intent to integrate our state schools, promote industry, and build roads. That's when he introduced his Better Schools Amendment aimed at destroying Oklahoma's constitutionality, segregated schools.

**AA:** Yeah.

**JE:** That's what you were talking about.

**AA:** Yeah, the amendment, by the way, does not just say we're going to integrate schools, I can't remember the exact wording but it looks like it's just changing the bookkeeping. But what it does is it takes out all the language calling for separate funding of schools.

**JE:** It's hard for us to believe that the state and other southern states had separate funding for blacks, separate funding for whites, and obviously more money was spent on white school districts than the black.

**AA:** Oh yeah, right.

**JE:** So largely because of him that ended that separate funding, and districts would be forced to integrate voluntarily, resulting in larger schools with better standards.

**AA:** Yeah, right.

**JE:** Many of us, I think, don't realize Raymond Gary actually started that for us here in this state. Isn't that true?

**AA:** Yeah. I think he deserves more recognition than he's had.

**JE:** Then he had to go out and campaign to the state and the voters overwhelmingly voted yes.

**AA:** Compare all that to what happened in some of those southern states.

**JE:** We became the only southern state voluntarily to begin to end segregation.

**AA:** Right.

**JE:** We were a leader in it.

**AA:** Yeah.

**JE:** And then he abolished separate bathrooms and fountains at state buildings, and he ended segregation on National Guard and Crime Bureau.

**AA:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** All came from Raymond Gary.

**AA:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

## Chapter 15 - 2:25

### David Hall

---

**John Erling:** Former Governor David Hall, he came out of Tulsa County, was an attorney from 1962 until he ran unsuccessfully for the Democratic nomination for governor in '66.

**Alex Adwan:** Hmm (thoughtful sound). Well, David Hall had all the makings of a great governor, but he got into trouble with this exchange of money that eventually got him convicted after his term ended.

**JE:** In '74, he was defeated in his bid for re-election.

**AA:** Right, which was a tragedy because he otherwise had a gift of salesmanship and politics and the way government works that might have taken him far. The other thing he should be remembered for is that he led the way for the Well-Head Tax on oil and gas that has been modified since that time, but without which the state of Oklahoma would be in much worse trouble today than it is. And it is in deep trouble, as you know, today, financially. But without David Hall it would be in much greater trouble.

**JE:** We might just say that the court said that David Hall was implicated in a plan to receive payment for influence over investment of state retirement funds.

**AA:** Right.

**JE:** He was convicted in '75, he served eighteen months in the Federal Correctional Institution in Arizona, and ultimately moved to California. When he ran in 1970, you'll remember this, his campaign slogan, "Hall of Oklahoma for all of Oklahoma."

**AA:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** And helped him defeat the incumbent, Republican Dewey Bartlett, in the 1970 general election. That was in the primary. Hall was the governor's race by a margin of only 2,181 votes, the closest gubernatorial race in state history.

**AA:** Yeah, the defeat of Dewey Bartlett, I don't know exactly why he was defeated, but I think it just had to do altogether with salesmanship and a better campaign run by Hall. Bartlett was moderate in his political views and not inclined to show business and grandstanding. After that, I think he decided that he needed to do more of that and he became more conservative.

**JE:** Dewey Bartlett?

**AA:** Dewey, he was there in the state House by the time I was correspondent there. Part of that time I thought the world of Dewey Bartlett and thought he was a great governor. Also, he introduced some legislation to take out some of the language, whatever little bit of odds and ends of racial language that remained in Oklahoma laws, he sponsored legislation to take it out, when he was in the state Senate.

## Chapter 16 - 4:45

### Bud Wilkinson

---

**John Erling:** Bud Wilkinson, coach of OU, the man the Sooner football teams earned a 145, 294 record, including 5 undefeated seasons, 3 national championships, the national record of 47 consecutive games without a defeat from '53 to '57. But then in '64, he resigns as head coach and he runs unsuccessfully against Fred Harris.

**Alex Adwan:** Right.

**JE:** Some recollections and some stories about that?

**AA:** First of all, my own view was that Bud would win that going away and I think everybody in Oklahoma thought that. But it was the year of the Goldwater campaign and that probably defeated him.

But he was a great football coach. One of the reasons he was a great football coach was because he's a great man. Everybody who played ball with him or had any business with him thought the world of him and had enormous respect for him. It's kind of sad

that the public couldn't catch on to that in that campaign, they were distracted by the presidential campaign. Goldwater saying, he wasn't serious, of course, but something about, "If we had a problem with the Soviet Union we could just drop one on the men's room at the Kremlin." Well, this just scared people.

But anyway, that beat Bud. And also, I think Bud never quite saw the difference between football and politics. Otis Sell, the longtime state House correspondent for the *Daily Oklahoman*, told him one time, said, "Bud, there's a big difference and it's this: in football, your quarterback will still be on your side in the fourth quarter, but in politics, that's not necessarily true."

And that certainly happened to him because he had some supporters who obviously, of course, we know now, drifted over to Fred Harris.

But I spent some good times with Bud on the campaign trail. And one time recall spending a day with him driving around the state listening to his story. And he told a great story, he said that he got a call from H. L. Hunt in Dallas, this was later he told me this, but he says, "I couldn't wait to get down there." He said, "Boy, this was the best news I had." And he went down to see Mr. Hunt and went up to his office and they had a nice visit.

He says, "Then Hunt took a letter-sized envelope out and it was big, it obviously had some thick paper stuff in it. And he said, 'Before you go, I want to give you this.'"

And Bud said, "Thank you very much," put it in his jacket. And he says he didn't want to open it out on the street or anything, so he waited till he was in his seat in the airplane and he took it out. He opened it up and it was a packet of a rightwing publication called "Human Events." Not a dime.

**JE:** He thought he was going to get an enormous donation.

**AA:** Yeah, he thought he'd hit the mother lode.

**JE:** I was told, correct me if I'm wrong, but when Bud would come out of the campaign trail he'd go to the small towns. He didn't really talk about football, and there were those who felt that he should have talked about football and related more to those people.

**AA:** It's back to what I say, he's a serious guy and he concentrates on what he's doing, with the idea of success, and it wouldn't occur to him to do anything but talk about politics. I mean, business is business.

**JE:** So then with Fred Harris running, who would have been one of the youngest from the state, I think he was like thirty-one years old, to defeat this very popular football coach.

**AA:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**JE:** It was one of the biggest political stories you ever had.

**AA:** It—he was a stunner, yeah. He really was. Fred was just a better campaigner. And, of course, this is an entirely different state today, the political makeup. The Democratic party was still a force in those days.

**JE:** Bud Wilkinson, was he kind of quiet, reserved person? But you could tell a quality about him that was good, I suppose.

**AA:** Yes, yes, everybody used the word “gentleman” to describe his conduct. He was always careful never to brag or predict easy victory or anything. He didn’t put up with any of that from players. He always dreaded the day that he would see something that he had said or that one of his players or coaches had said that would be posted in every locker room in the Big 8, you know, that’s not good.

So people made fun of him, “So how are you going to do against Kansas? OU’s number one in the nation. Kansas hasn’t won a game all season.”

“Well, we’ve got a good chance there but things can go wrong. We’re going to have to play a good game and so on.” That’s as far as he’d go.

**JE:** You were around him during his campaign?

**AA:** Uh-huh (affirmative).

**JE:** Did you get a sense from him that he felt like he was going to win this thing?

**AA:** I really didn’t get a sense much one way or another. He’s not the kind of guy who would say, “Look, I’m going to win this thing.”

**JE:** Yeah.

**AA:** And blah, blah, blah. And he’s certainly not the kind who would throw up his hands and say, “I’ve lost.” I think it caught him by surprise.

## Chapter 17 - 1:50

### Carl Albert

---

**John Erling:** Carl Albert, from 1971 to ’76, Carl Albert served as Speaker of the US House of Representatives. He was, of course, from Oklahoma. About him, this little man from Dixie.

**Alex Adwan:** Carl Albert had one thing in common with Raymond Gary, he could do things that normally you’d think wouldn’t fly very well in Oklahoma. But he could maneuver his way around and convince people that it was all right. He had a great mind and knew there was to know about the House of Representatives and studied and took lessons at the feet of Sam Rayburn. So he was perfectly qualified for the job as Speaker of the House.

There was something mentioned earlier about Paige Belcher. It’s interesting that Paige Belcher and Carl Albert were both outstanding bridge players in a circuit up there, and they were partners, they played for many years and were very close friends. Either one of them could get up and make a rousing partisan speech, even that might get on the toes of the other fellow a little bit. Or certainly any one of them could make a speech about

something that he supported. And that was nearly the end of that, I mean, they were both working for the American people and for the people of Oklahoma.

**JE:** Carl was a Democrat and Paige Belcher was a Republican.

**AA:** Right.

**JE:** But that was the civil discourse—

**AA:** Right.

**JE:** ...we could have back then in those days.

**AA:** Right. Carl Albert was not known for just having a tremendous sense of humor, but he told a funny story out on the campaign trail. The story was that a postmaster in his district had died and a man called him at home and said, “The postmaster, Mr. So-and-So here has just died. I’d like to take his place.”

And Carl said, “Well, if it’s all right with him, it’s all right with me.”

I don’t know whether it ever happened or not but he liked to tell that. It may have been something he liked to do.

## Chapter 18 - 5:15

### Ed Edmondson

---

**John Erling:** Then there’s Ed Edmondson in 1952, Oklahoma’s 2nd District voters first elected him as a Democrat to the US House of Representatives. He served from ’53 to ’73. So in twenty years there, then in ’72 and ’74, he ran for the US Senate.

**Alex Adwan:** Ed Edmondson was one of the leading figures in getting the Arkansas Navigation Project built from start to finish. It started up there about the time he got in Congress and he followed it through and worked with all the other members, of course. But he was very influential in that and was very highly respected among other members of the House that he worked with. He had friends in all places but he was at heart an eastern Oklahoma politician who could play a pretty rough game when it called for it. And there’s a special brand of politics in what is called Little Dixie that until recently, at least, was kind of unknown in Tulsa or even Oklahoma City. So he was a master politician and a very effective congressman for that district.

He also had a great sense of humor and loved to talk about the House. He said one time, someone found a contribution on one of his lists from Volkswagen of America. And this was not me, I got this secondhand. They went to him and said, “You’ve got a nice contribution here from VW, but just a week ago you were up someplace condemning foreign automobile makers and talking about how we’re going to have to protect America from these foreign cars.”

And Ed says, “Well, when I talk about the foreign automobile makers, I’m talking about the bad ones, not the good ones.”

**JE:** As popular as he was as a representative from that district, he ran for the US Senate two times, '72 and '74. And he focused his dislike of Democratic presidential candidate George McGovern and his support for economic measures to help the little man. However, Republicans Dewey Bartlett and Henry Bellmon defeated him.

**AA:** Part of that I think is just the beginnings of what we see as I take for granted now that Oklahoma was at that point rapidly turning into a reliable Republican state. That certainly was part of it. I mentioned earlier, I think that Bellmon in particular ran a campaign that appealed to a lot of Democrats. But I don’t think Edmondson had a campaign that appealed to people who would normally vote for a Republican. In other words, he probably didn’t gain much in votes by voting for that busing amendment, but he lost a bunch of them when he did to Bellmon.

**JE:** Then he tried again in '78, but lost his party’s nomination to David Boren. So as much as we hear the name Edmondson—

**AA:** Yeah.

**JE:** ...which was very powerful.

**AA:** Right.

**JE:** It also served up three defeats.

**AA:** Right, I can’t explain it. I was not too surprised at the outcome of any of those elections, but I think part of it was just a change in the whole—

**JE:** Complexion?

**AA:** ...temper of politics in Oklahoma.

**JE:** Could we point that back to Governor Bellmon being the first Republican governor of the state that had always been Democrat? So Republicans can point to him as beginning to turn this state as a Republican.

**AA:** Yeah.

**JE:** Would that be true?

**AA:** Yeah, yeah, that was certainly a landmark. He had a lot to do with it. Bellmon campaigned specifically to attract Democratic votes. He kept trying to explain to people, “Three out of every four voters are Democrats. You’re going to have to get some of them to vote for you or you’re not going to win an election.” And that was hard to explain to some of the old-time Republicans.

**JE:** But Edmondson wasn’t able to work that from the Republican side.

**AA:** No.

**JE:** Somehow and pull people over.

**AA:** But he may have heard himself in the process of trying. In other words, it doesn’t help him

if he does something like that busing amendment that is not going to get him any votes from Republicans or hardheaded conservatives or Democrats anyway, but it's going to lose him some votes of people who might have voted for him otherwise.

**JE:** Did you as an editorial writer support him?

**AA:** No, we criticized him. I don't believe we endorsed anyone outright in that first election, but we did not support him.

**JE:** But didn't the newspaper generally support Republicans?

**AA:** Well, no, they had supported Democrats in the past. But if you're going to support somebody you have to oppose somebody. And I think the feeling was, and the first one of those I didn't have a lot to do with it, but the feeling was that we don't oppose people who have done a good job, even if we like the other guy better.

**JE:** Yeah because these were people like Dewey Bartlett and Henry Bellmon, so you would have had to oppose those people.

**AA:** Right. The other thing is that I have always believe that an incumbent, regardless of party is doing a good job and a political job, he's working for the public and he's doing a good job in that, you've really got to give the benefit of the doubt to him. Or put it another way, you have to have a pretty good reason to want to throw him out, because otherwise you have a system in which people are not rewarded for doing a good job.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

## Chapter 19 - 5:30

### Mike Monroney

---

**John Erling:** Mike Monroney, twelve years in the House, spanned the end of the New Deal, World War II, the beginning of the Cold War, and the Korean Conflict. Then he, in 1950, decided to challenge Oklahoma's four-term senator Elmer Thomas. Do you have some recollection of Mike Monroney?

**Alex Adwan:** Yes, he was in the Senate when I was there and was defeated in 1968. We went there in '70, and at that time, Bob Kerr had died, and Teresa's father was Mike's administrative assistant, Carter Bradley. Monroney was another star and had all the attributes of a great politician, but he just over years lost touch with the changing opinions in Oklahoma. As late as his last campaign, he was on a big anti-gun kick. Oh that hurt him. He had a lot of good connections in Washington and knew everybody who amounted to anything and was a very important part of the political and social scene there. But he had

been there so long there were people in small towns around who didn't know him and had never met him and had never had a chance to shake his hand.

And that is bad news. You've got to work at this business if you want to keep on doing the job.

**JE:** He was a great public speaker, wasn't he?

**AA:** Yes he knew how to make a speech.

**JE:** So here he's running in '68 against Henry Bellmon, who was not a great public speaker. I'm sure there were many who thought Monroney's speaking ability was going to get him through, when Henry was not a public speaker.

**AA:** That's true. It had to do with the very fact that Henry Bellmon in that campaign had probably shaken hands with more people and knew more people personally in influential places and small towns around than Monroney, even though he was a younger man and had not had all those years.

But Mike Monroney, there was a time when he knew every small town banker and every publisher and every county commissioner in the state of Oklahoma, and could probably call them by first names. That disappeared for him over the years.

**JE:** But he was so strong in Washington, he was a strong supporter of Adlai Stevenson. Matter of fact, in 1960, he headed the effort to draft Stevenson for a third presidential nomination. But he was considered to be named to the ticket with Stevenson in 1952.

**AA:** Yeah.

**JE:** To show how strong he was.

**AA:** Right. Well, that 1960 convention, that's of interest to me because he was way out of tune with the Oklahoma Democratic party and everybody at the convention at that time. He was way out of tune. But he had an advantage, everybody in the delegation knew Mike Monroney personally and they liked him, so they're going to cut him some slack.

It didn't bother Bob Kerr or Raymond Gary that Mike Monroney's off on this wild goose chase, and that's what it was, to get headlined back in business. That didn't make everybody mad but over time, people who didn't know him, that kind of stuff hurt him, being Independent.

By the way, that was the highlight of the convention for me. Again, just as a name-dropping thing, but Allan Cromley, the Washington correspondent for the *Oklahoman*, and I went over to see Monroney at the headquarters' hotel where he was staying. He met us in the lobby. We called in advance and he says, "Boys, before we go upstairs to my place I want you to come with me right now because I want you to meet Eleanor Roosevelt."

So we got on the elevator and went up, went to her room, knocked on the door, and went in there and he introduced us to her. And she sat there and talked to us. We had a nice long visit with her.

**JE:** Do you remember what you talked about?

**AA:** Not much of anything. As a matter of form we asked her about the race, you know, “How do you think it’s going to go?”

“Well, I don’t know.” She didn’t have much to say about it.

I think they all knew that it was just exercise and feel good stuff and principle, you know. But it was something to see her and meet her.

The point I’m making is that Monroney is a guy who knew her and he’d call her and say, “I want to bring a couple of guys up here to see you.”

She’d say, “Well, give me a minute to get my hair fixed and bring him on up.” That’s the point to make about Mike.

**JE:** When he came to the Senate it was during the height of the McCarthy affair. As a matter of fact, he and McCarthy clashed in Senate debates. McCarthy was calling out everybody as a communist, and Monroney was the one who was confronting him about that. And then also, Monroney voted for the Civil Rights Acts of ’57, ’60, and ’64.

**AA:** Yeah. I just admire him greatly for all those things and the courageous things, whether you agree with him or not. But even in those instances, a lot of people in Oklahoma had to hold their noses to vote for him after those votes, but they would say, like Milt Philips, my old boss, “Mike is just getting so liberal, I’m just getting a bellyful of him. But of course, we’re going to have to support him because he’s our good friend, so we cut him some slack.”

But people don’t cut slack for a politician they don’t know.

**JE:** He had a likeability that helped overcome all of that.

**AA:** Sure, sure.

**JE:** So it’s interesting, he is defeated after thirty years of service to the state.

**AA:** I interviewed him after his defeat and he was getting ready to leave. I’d asked him if he thought he’d made a mistake with some of these liberal stands that he’d taken, especially in the campaign. He said, “Look, I’ve always done what I thought was right. I look back over it and I’m just telling you, I wouldn’t change a thing.” That’s the way he felt about it.

## Chapter 20 - 7:35

### Robert Kerr

---

**John Erling:** Let me just jump to one of the most powerful senators the state ever had and that’s Senator Robert Kerr. He was our first native-born governor in 1942, then he was Keynote Speaker at the Democratic National Convention and came to the attention

of the Democratic party. He helped secure the vice presidential nomination for Harry S. Truman. Some recollection of him as he was continuing his strong influence in Washington and the state?

**Alex Adwan:** Much of my impression of him comes from my father-in-law, who was the chief clerk of his Space Committee during his chairmanship. And from Melvina Stevenson, who was on his staff for a number of years and who coauthored our, I guess did the ghostwriting for his book *Wood, Water, and Land*. But he was one of the brightest politicians, I would say, along with David Boren, he probably had the highest IQ of just about anybody that you could find in politics in this state.

He had also a very practical attitude about things. He set goals like the Arkansas River Project. He decided early in life that floods, the water and drought cycle of Oklahoma was a terrible thing and that we needed to do something about it. And the way to do it was to conserve and control the water sources, and stop flooding. Then the idea of navigation came to mind, that was his great achievement for Oklahoma.

He had a great ambition and ran for president and lost it in 1952, I think it was. And then he devoted all his time to just serving Oklahoma, and that's what he did. And he did it very well.

He was a teetotaler and Tom Steed tells about the time after he first came to Washington and elected to Senate. He had a big party for all the important people in Washington. He was a junior senator, but he was also a very wealthy man and well-known to people there. Everybody shows up, no alcohol. It was at a country club, no booze.

Sam Rayburn, under Truman, senator from Kentucky, showing up, and said, "Need a drink."

He says, "Well, you know, Senator Kerr, he's a teetotaler and opposed to alcohol."

And he says, "You can't be serious."

He says, "No I'm afraid, he's serious about it." But then Tom said, "He's elected himself as a guy who ran over from wherever this big reception or party that was going on back to the bar in the country club, buying drinks for these guys and smuggling them in there."

Kerr, he was really sincere about that, and one of the reasons for it was he didn't want anything that might harm what he considered to be his greatest asset, which was his mind.

I thought, "You know, that makes a lot of sense. If something hurts your brain like alcohol does and you can see it, why you would just say, 'I'm not going to ever let that happen to me.'"

Until Kerr was elected governor, the history of the office of governor of Oklahoma was one of conflict and ill will and controversy almost all the time. It never stopped. Two governors were impeached, and there were others that weren't impeached but had the most bitter kind of opposition. And politics in Oklahoma was almost as bad as it is now, but Kerr came in and he brought a sense of good humor and goodwill to that

office that was so subtle that it escaped the notice of a lot of people. But it changed the whole nature of things for a time. Made it possible for people to govern without all this bitterness and accusing people of crimes.

Of course, things have changed. The Klu Klux Klan was gone, for example. He got known as Sorghum Bob, and he took Oklahoma sorghum and gave it to VIPs around the country.

**JE:** Sorghum was what?

**AA:** Sorghum is syrup and it was an Oklahoma product that he liked, so he did that. And he changed the whole tone of politics.

**JE:** He also was a supporter, he was chair of the powerful Aeronautical and Space Science Committee in the '60s. He and John Kennedy became very good friends, didn't they?

**AA:** They did, Kennedy depended on Kerr, who by then had got the name of being the king of the Senate. Kennedy depended on him and he got his vote most of the time. But the big division came over Medicare. Kennedy wanted something similar to what we have now and Kerr wanted something that didn't have anything to do with the Social Security system. And he prevailed on that. Both of them died before the present system came in.

He was so important to Kennedy that Kennedy came down here on the famous trip to Big Cedar, then stayed at Kerr's ranch by Poteau.

**JE:** What was it Kennedy came for? There was a dedication, wasn't there?

**AA:** There was a dedication of a scenic road through a national forest. I mean, this was not the kind of thing that presidents ordinarily fly halfway across the continent to dedicate. There's a scenic highway through the Ouachita National Forest. But he stayed at Kerr's place there and Kerr entertained him royally. He was like a king coming into a distant place where he has to deal with an unhappy baron, a powerful baron who's unhappy.

Mind you, I didn't use this, but it's kind of like Henry the Eighth calling on his minister in *Man of All Seasons*. Great scene where he comes to call on him at home, try to make up.

**JE:** Kerr, we give him credit for what he did for water in Oklahoma. His chairmanship of the Rivers and Harbors Subcommittee where he gave out favors and collected favors, that really projected him in a big way. Because he dealt not only with Oklahoma, but many other states.

**AA:** Oh yeah.

**JE:** It made him even more and more powerful, and so, if he sought that or not, that was his reason for being so instrumental in the waterways of Oklahoma.

**AA:** Oh yeah, he knew how to do that. He says, "Every time I do anything, somebody gets up and they accuse me of being a rich oilman. And I wouldn't mind that except then they get out and prove it on me." And that was the end of any criticism having to do with his wealth or conflict of interest.

**JE:** But then, wasn't it because it seemed like he was favoring the oil industry and all that it put him out of touch and it actually defeated him when he tried to run for president?

**AA:** It may have. That whole thing, being a rich oilman, that's not a good background to be president.

**JE:** Must have been a terrible surprise, he suffered a mild heart attack, never recovered, and he was really at the top of his power and prominence in the Senate.

**AA:** Yeah, at the top of his game, he was. It would be interesting to know what would have happened. One thing what happened we know from the record, we probably wouldn't have had Medicare for another few years.

One time he got a bill through to put this water pollution research station at Ada, which was his home town. He worked on that and it's no big deal, but he got it through. And then it got up for a final vote in the committee and Senator Anderson of New Mexico, says, "Let's lay a bill on this water resources facility. I have a very good location for that in New Mexico."

And Kerr says, "Senator, the purpose of this meeting is not to decide where this is going to be located, the purpose is to decide why it's going to be located in Ada, Oklahoma." And then he explained why it was going to be located there.

**JE:** Yeah.

## Chapter 21 - 4:05

### Nixon—Goldwater

---

**John Erling:** You've interviewed Richard Nixon in 1964. Nixon was our thirty-seventh president from '69 to '74. Also the thirty-sixth Vice President. He was the only president to resign the office and also the only person to be elected twice, to both the presidency and the vice presidency. You interviewed him in '64, which was between his defeat of the presidency by John F. Kennedy and him running again. So tell us about that.

**Alex Adwan:** Well, that was then during his time of wandering in the wilderness. He came to OSU, Oklahoma State University, for a political gathering. And then he met with two other reporters and me afterward and we had a very long, informal visit. It was just a nice visit more than an interview. But the point I came away with was that this is a charming, nice guy. He says, "You know, I'm out of it right now. I'm just out here campaigning for Barry Goldwater."

But he stayed in there and talked to us for a long time. And he was just charming. He's just altogether a different person than you saw depicted with the heavy beard and that image.

Then he got elected and he got back into power and then the old Nixon seemed to come out. He was one man when he was out there. And he was just being a good soldier.

He didn't say so out but it was clear he was telling us, "I know it's not going anywhere but I'm a good soldier and I'm going to campaign for him."

**JE:** For Barry Goldwater?

**AA:** Campaign for him.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative).

**AA:** "If I have to come to Oklahoma State University, I will." You know.

And then later, I had the same kind of an interview, also at Oklahoma State and under almost the same circumstances with Barry Goldwater. And I had the same impression. He just came through such a delightful man. He had lost this election and he probably knew that he was never going to be president. So he says, "Well, nobody pays any attention to what Goldy says about anything anyway." Lines like that. It changed my whole opinion and my whole image of him.

**JE:** Barry Goldwater was known as Mr. Conservative. I think they point to him to this very day that he would have been the start of the conservative movement. And those today in 2010, where it's much stronger than it ever was in his day, should point to Barry Goldwater in 1964. Because he started running as a conservative on that platform.

**AA:** He did have a tremendous impact in the long-term, and that is correct. But my own view of him, and I'm not a Goldwater expert, is that I think he would not agree with a lot of the things that are going on today because he was a very consistent libertarian. He used the word conservative, he called himself that, and he was in many ways, but he was first of all a libertarian. And I don't think he would be very comfortable with some of these stands people take on things like abortion, for example. Maybe even, I'm not sure how he'd be, maybe not even some of this religion in government thing, I'm not sure.

**JE:** He'd be strong for gay rights because before his death he was very supportive of gay rights.

**AA:** He's not a racist by any stretch, I'm convinced of that, but he voted against Civil Rights bills because it was his belief that the federal government shouldn't be interfering, you know, too much power for the federal government. If you take the race factor out of it, which is hard to do, I'd stress that, but it's still a kind of a libertarian position.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative). But you found him to be just a very engaging person?

**AA:** He was.

**JE:** And to suffer one of the biggest defeats in the history of the presidency—

**AA:** Yeah.

**JE:** ...as a matter of fact.

**AA:** Another visit he came here to Oklahoma, I guess this was during the campaign. I was at a news conference and he had already made some kind of statement about selling the

Tennessee Valley Authority. And I asked him again, I said, “Well, I think you’ve said you’re in favor of selling the Tennessee Valley Authority?”

Well, he gave the answer again and got a lot of publicity. Again, he didn’t think the government had any reason to be building a big project like that.

## Chapter 22 - 3:00

### Important Names

---

**John Erling:** Some names that probably were important to you? Phil Dessauer at the *Tulsa World*.

**Alex Adwan:** Yeah. Phil, he’s a terrific writer, and to the extent that I know how to write an intro, which I really don’t, but if I did, I would owe it to Phil. And I’d write a column. He’s a very good writer and we were good friends. He was also a former UPI employee, although our work there was not contemporaneous. He was a good friend and he had a lot to do with me coming over here.

**JE:** Byron Boon?

**AA:** Byron was publisher of the *World*. One of those great, larger than life characters that you read about. He was a hard man to work for sometimes, but most of the time, he was a delightful guy to be around because he had strong opinions and he liked to express them, and he enjoyed life, and liked to tell stories about politics especially, and things like that.

**JE:** Walter Biscup?

**AA:** Walter was an editorial page editor and a major figure at the *Tulsa World* for a long time, starting back in the ’20s, I guess. He came up here from Muskogee and he was a favorite of Mr. Lorton. For a long time he was a reporter who just covered big stories, and especially those that were of some interest to Mr. Lorton.

If Mr. Lorton had a story he wanted to cover he’d deal sometimes directly with Walter. Then he became editorial page editor, best editor in a technical sense that I believe I’ve ever seen. I always knew that my copy, if there was a date wrong in it or anything like that, he’d catch it. Sometimes he would miss something that I wish he’d change it for some other reason, but just editing, he knew how to do it.

And he must have been, I know from the record that he was a terrific reporter, he covered the big lawsuit that was brought against big oil back in the late ’40s or early ’50s in Chicago. Big story, of course, for the oil capital of the world.

**JE:** Sid Steen?

**AA:** Sid was executive editor when I came here with UPI, and he was awfully good to me and he helped me with my UPI business. Later on when this job opened up, Sid was another

who persuaded the management there that I might be good for the job. And he was a great guy and a good editor, but not anybody you'd want to go get a raise from.

People tell the stories about going in there saying, "I haven't had a raise for a long time."

And Sid would say, "Well, I know it's tough, but what you need to do now is go back out there and get back to work and we'll see what works out."

**JE:** And then the *Tulsa World*.

**AA:** Well, it's one of the greatest things that ever happened to me and sort of a fulfillment of my life ambition to have a job like I had there at the end. And I couldn't have had that job under better employers than I did. I'm no longer connected with it so it's not self-serving for me to say it. But the Lorton family, I don't think people understand everything they've done for Tulsa, through the newspaper as well as through philanthropic acts.

## Chapter 23 - 1:30

### Education Editorials

---

**John Erling:** Is there any one editorial that you wrote that comes back to your memory that either changed something or you got a major reaction from or you were particularly proud of?

**Alex Adwan:** The most important thing in my mind, issue, was over time, public education and connected with that the whole idea of getting a tax base that would support good government and especially education in Oklahoma. And that all came to a head during this 1017 fight that we discussed earlier. I call that the Armageddon of Education and we won it, and most of the votes in favor of it came from northeastern Oklahoma. If we had lost, the one thing that would have done, that would have stopped an Oklahoma school term right in the middle and cut off the money because it included the revenue that was needed for that budget.

Imagine what that would have been. Closed down the schools, in so many words.

**JE:** So you wrote many, many editorials supporting that vote?

**AA:** Yes.

**JE:** Obviously.

**AA:** Yes.

**JE:** And I would imagine there are those who credit the newspaper and you in helping pass that.

**AA:** Well, Henry Bellmon is the guy who got it passed, and he did it by persuading Democrats to go along and keeping some of his Republican friends in line. And mostly by just in the public to support it.

**JE:** I can remember Henry Bellmon came here to Tulsa to sign the House bill 1017. He signed it on the school grounds of Marshal Elementary and my wife, Margaret, was the principal of that school at the time.

**AA:** That's great.

**JE:** Yeah.

## Chapter 24 - 3:00

### Journalism Students

---

**John Erling:** Students who are entering journalism today, this is all for them now. Do you have some advice for them about writing and all that?

**Alex Adwan:** Well, my advice would be to be, first of all, a good writer. Because to be a good communicator you have to have something to communicate, and that starts with getting something down on paper, writing, and those skills related to that. Beyond that, I don't know of any technical education that I can recommend because I don't know where the technology is leading. But I would advise anyone who is going into to it to learn all of the skills of the show business side of journalism: how to speak on a platform, how to perform on television, and how to address a group of people. Because it has now become show business, there is a show business aspect to it that is more important than some guy like me sitting down at a typewriter and batting out his story and putting it on the wire.

**JE:** Because journalists are being called upon to speak publicly rather than just let them be behind the dark room and writing, is what you're saying?

**AA:** That's right. In order to be a good Washington correspondent, say you've got a job like David Broder, the distinguished political writer who wrote *Washington Post*, he's had to learn in his old age, almost, how to appear on television and handle all those things, and he does very well at it. I've just mentioned him as an example.

**JE:** Some of it is the same though, if these students would go to the small town newspapers and work as you did.

**AA:** The small town newspapers are not doing as badly as the big ones, but I hope that opportunity is still open. Nearly seventy-five, in that range, of the journalism students at OU are now enrolled in the public relations or related studies. What we used to call News and Editorial is a minority there now. That tells you that they think there's more opportunity in journalism broadly defined, including public relations, than they do someone who just goes and covers stories.

**JE:** Is money driving that?

**AA:** Money, but just success in general. If you're going to go into something you want to be good at it and succeed at it, but money is an important part of it, sure.

**JE:** But there is more opportunity today to be a writer than there was back when you were at it because on the Internet they're writing on websites, they're writing on blogs. A lot of people are writing where they probably wouldn't be writing, maybe for a newspaper.

**AA:** That's true, but if you're going to succeed in that, if you're going to be competing in the blog world you've really got a lot of competition, you're going to have to be very good at it.

**JE:** Right, but even newspapers like the *Tulsa World* will have writers for print.

**AA:** Yeah.

**JE:** And then there are writers for online.

**AA:** Yeah.

**JE:** So that online category has opened up for writers to come along—

**AA:** Right.

**JE:** ...and continue to hone their skills.

**AA:** There's a lot of writers, successful people today, who go out and they write a column or a story for a newspaper and then turn around and do a regular TV appearance. You see that all the time. That's what I would tell journalists of the future that they need to learn those things.

**JE:** Yeah.

## Chapter 25 - 1:45

### A Privilege

---

**John Erling:** So then, what are you most proud of as you reflect on your career?

**Alex Adwan:** I can't point to any great achievement. The things that I believe in and I've mentioned those things here, I do the best I can to promote those things: education, civil rights, those kinds of things. Education, because it's local and because it's so important at this level, I'd say, to be the number one thing.

**JE:** And there's got to be some satisfaction when you're writing to support an issue and you see the public accept it. And the feeling to know that you had made a contribution to the public thinking. That had to bring satisfaction to you.

**AA:** Yes. One of the things that I tried to keep in mind is that I do have that privilege, and that's what it is, it's a right, but that's a legal term, a right. It's really a privilege because not everybody has the right to have the voice that the *Tulsa World* offers, it's a privilege. And

I've always tried to keep that in mind. I didn't have any single goal in mind, and I've always known that public education is one of the essentials and that it needs to be supported.

**JE:** Here at your age, and your age now is eighty, do you do any writing now?

**AA:** No I haven't written anything for a couple of years and I probably won't. Because the truth is it's time to realize that the time has come when you're not going to function as well as you should. And if you're going to write something you need to be able to remember at the end of the sentence what you started to say at the first.

**JE:** Well, what a career and what a life. From Maud, Oklahoma.

**AA:** Yeah.

**JE:** To here.

**AA:** Yeah.

**JE:** That's good.

**AA:** Thank you.

**JE:** You're welcome, and thanks so much for doing this.

**AA:** Yeah.

**JE:** I appreciate it very much.

**AA:** I really appreciate it myself.

**JE:** Thank you.

**AA:** Thank you.

## Chapter 26—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. Thank you for your support as we preserve Oklahoma's legacy one voice at a time, on [VoicesofOklahoma.com](http://VoicesofOklahoma.com).