Carrie Dickerson

An unlikely activist, she educated herself about nuclear energy and risked everything to stop the Black Fox Plant.

Chapter 01 – 00:55
Introduction

Announcer: When Carrie Dickerson first saw a newspaper headline about the electric company's plans to build a nuclear power plant near her home in Inola, Oklahoma, she knew little about nuclear reactors and less about the legal process through which they were built and operated.

To learn more, she asked the Atomic Energy Commission to send her all the information they had on nuclear energy. Carrie received stacks of documents which she read over the next few months turning her worry about nuclear energy into determination. She would fight to stop the Black Fox plant with all the resources she had.

Before it was over the fight would cost her and her husband Robert their entire savings, their nursing home, and almost the family farm.

Listen to Patricia Lemon, Carrie's daughter, tell this very inspiring story of triumphs and hardships which stopped the building of the Black Fox Nuclear Power Plant on the oral history website *VoicesofOklahoma.com*.

Chapter 02 – 11:05
Family of Educators

John Erling: My name is John Erling, and today's date is July 27, 2017.
Patricia, would you state your full name, please?
Patricia Lemon: My name is Patricia Dickerson Lemon.
JE: Your date of birth?
PL: I was born on the 19th of January, 1940.
JE: Your present age today?

PL: I am now seventy-seven.

JE: We are recording this interview by phone. We are in the studios of KWGS, the NPR station on campus of the University of Tulsa. Where are you for this recording, Patricia?

PL: I am in an elder's apartment building in Herndon, Virginia, near where my daughter lives.

JE: Where were you born?

PL: I was born in Claremore, at the Claremore General Hospital, which at that time was on Main Street, on the second floor, run by a Dr. Malloy.

JE: Your mother's name?

PL: My mother was Carrie Barefoot Dickerson. She was born in 1917.

JE: The name Barefoot, where does that come from?

PL: If you look in the *Heimskringla* which is the book of the histories of the rulers of Scandinavia, you find a Magnus Barefoot. He was called Barefoot because he was a Viking who conquered part of Northern Ireland. And when he was there, got accustomed and pleased with the idea of not wearing his leg-warmers—he went with his legs bare—till when he went home again to Denmark or Sweden, I don't remember what he considered his original birthplace, he didn't wear the leg coverings.

So the kids would run along beside him in the street and yell out, "Barefoot! Barefoot! Magnus Barefoot!" And that's where the name came from.

The Barefoot is actually her maiden name. Her given name, Carrie, is, I believe, for Carrie Nation, also for her mother who was also named for Carrie Nation.

JE: Tell us what your mother, Carrie, was like. What kind of a mother was she?

PL: Mother was a very frustrated mother, I have to say. When I was two years old, she started teaching in a little place, a Mennonite town near Inola, called Pleasant View. She would have to spend a week at a time there and only be able to come home on the weekends. And even that was pretty hard. She loved the people in the community. She would be boarded in one of the homes because it was a one-room schoolhouse. She would have to start the fire in the stove in the morning to heat the place up. And cook breakfast and lunch for the kids in the school.

You know, some of her students would come and visit when I was a teenager. They all spoke wonderfully of her.

When I was two, in 1942, my sister Florence was born and when Mother had to go back and teach school she used talk about taking Mother by the hand and saying, "Mommy, don't you love your little girl?"

And it just broke Mother's heart but she had to go back and work so that the bank would not foreclose on the farm and we would still have the farm.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

PL: Oh, she sacrificed a great deal for my family.

JE: Your father's name?

PL: My father was Charles Robert Dickerson. He was the son of Eugene Dickerson, who was born in Missouri, and Anna Victoria Haynes, who was a Cherokee from Sageeyah, which is near the Verdigris River, outside of Claremore.

JE: Describe his personality. What do you remember about your father?

PL: Daddy, because he was brought up by two teachers, one of whom was a very strict Baptist, was brought up with great propriety, too much, I think. He was very shy as a boy, but as a father he was wonderful.

JE: Did you have brothers and sisters?

PL: I had my sister, Florence, who was two years younger. My brother, Jimmy, was six years younger. And another sister born in 1950.

JE: Before we proceed with the story of Carrie, your education background?

PL: Well, everybody in my family was a teacher of one sort or another. I started out at Justice School, which is a community that the farm is in. In the second grade, I went to a school in Prior, the public school. I was never anywhere but a public school and I went to Claremore High School where I received an amazingly good general education. Actually, a classical education, aside from the fact that there was no Latin or Greek taught there. Although, in my father's time there was.

But I wanted to learn Latin so I took a correspondence course from a professor at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville.

JE: So then you were on to college?

PL: Yes, after that I was on to college. I was offered scholarships just about every place I applied, including a merit scholarship because my scores on the SAT were so high.

JE: Where did you go to college?

PL: I went to Radcliff, which is now part of Harvard.

JE: Did you go on for further degrees?

PL: Well, I have a degree in counseling from the University of Massachusetts.

JE: Just briefly, what did you ultimately do then as a career?

PL: Well, when I was an undergraduate I worked for a Nobel Prize winner, Georg von Békésy, who got the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1961. He had had such a strange upbringing that he didn't know how to start sentences well in English, so I edited all his writings, including the Nobel Prize acceptance speech.

He was a wonderful man. I really enjoyed being his lab assistant.

JE: Could you spell his name?

PL: G-e-o-r-g, Georg, von, v-o-n, Békésy, is B-é-k-é-s-y, with accents on the e's. It's Hungarian, not actually noble but upper class name.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative). You were married? Who did you marry?

PL: My husband, Edward William Yachton Lemon, was a fellow student when I arrived at Harvard. He was a fantastic musician—and still is—although he has a problem with his fingers that means he has to play by muscle memory rather than by his telling his fingers what to do. His fingers have to tell him what to do. He is a wonderful musician and also played as a jazz pianist.

That was probably the thing that first attracted me to him. But the second was that he is a fantastic linguist as well. He speaks a number of languages, he's a linguist, and has been a teacher most of his life.

JE: How old is he today?

PL: He's the same age I am.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

PL: He was born in June instead of January, that was the only difference.

JE: But you were musical too because Carrie bought a piano for you and you became a singer.

PL: Well, actually, Carrie bought a piano because her father was a pianist. He used to play for church services in the little town where she grew up, Nuyaka. So when her stepfather threw out his piano because he couldn't stand the thought of his predecessor, she developed a desire to have a piano. So with her first paycheck from Pleasant View she went to an estate auction she bought a piano and paid to have it brought out to the farm.

She taught herself to play the piano. Because she had started so late she never got really good at it but she loved it. And, of course, all of us kids loved it too.

JE: But you went on to become a fairly accomplished soloist.

PL: Well, yes, because I really was not much of a pianist until much later in my life. I used to sing both in the chorus and as a soloist. I have to tell you, I loved singing more than almost anything else because it gave me a chance to express my emotions.

You know, that was a time when we were all very shut in in our own minds and spirits.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

PL: Things have changed a lot since then. But at that time, my only real emotional release was singing. So I sang as much as I could. I would walk out through the fields to bring in the cows or the sheep or to make sure the geese weren't being killed by some predator. And I would sing popular songs as I walked out there.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

PL: But when I was in college, I was in Radcliff Choral Society and I have done a great deal of singing in musicals. I once was the [indiscernible] woman in Gilbert and Sullivan. At college, I was in the chorus in the Gilbert and Sullivan Society. I loved that so much.

I never became a professional singer.

JE: You had children?

PL: I have two children, a son and a daughter. My son is named after his father and my daughter, Sydney went to Wellesley.

JE: And how you have grandchildren?

PL: No grandchildren.

JE: Okay.

Chapter 03 – 5:14
Aunt Carrie

John Erling: Well, we're here to tell the story of *Aunt Carrie's War Against Black Fox Nuclear Power Plant*, which is the name of the book she wrote about her experience with your help, as the book says, "with Patricia Lemon."

Patricia Lemon: Yeah.

JE: Before we get into that story, I just want to hold up a newspaper this morning. On this date, July 27th in the *Tulsa World*, it says, "PSO Announces $1.3 Billion

Wind Energy Investment. And the decision from PSO can give customers up to 40 percent of their power from wind by late 2020, if the project receives regulatory approval."

But not only that newspaper deals with energy, the front page of the *USA Today*, 7/27/17, "Nuclear Plant Closure Send Towns into Crisis." So those headlines will make sense to our listeners, and I'll repeat them at the end as we move along.

You know, we hear the story about Carrie Dickerson, the little housewife who came off a farm to do this. But let's talk about her education background. What did she have?

PL: She was a housewife who had graduated from OSU with a degree in education. She started out to be a teacher, but then went back to get a master's degree when she was teaching at Tiawah, which is a town south of Claremore where I went to the fourth grade. She was doing the research for her master's degree.

In the winter, there was very little fresh vegetables they could eat except stuff that was canned and cooked to death. A lot of the students there had boils on the backs of their necks, very painful boils that caused scars, till Mother talked to all the parents and asked for them to agree to help with her experiment, which was to give the kids A and D vitamin pills on a daily basis and to talk to them about their diet when they went to the school cafeteria, which was even harder. But over the course of a couple of months, all of those boils went away and the kids had nice clear skin, with no pain.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

PL: That was the basis of her master's thesis, seen in the library at OSU. There is also a Carrie Dickerson collection in the library at OSU with a lot of the mementos from this whole Black Fox fight.

JE: She taught Home Economics in the Inola High School.

PL: Yes, she taught Home Economics once she had her master's degree. And she taught several places around the county, including Talala and Chelsea. In Chelsea she got into a fight with the principal, because she believed boys should be taught Home Economics just as much as girls should. So she let the boys into her classes and they really responded very positively, they loved it.

And they were in Shop and they were building a little cottage as part of their Shop experience. And she taught them what was important about constructing a house and what was important about designing a house.

But the principal felt that the boys should not learn anything about housekeeping or how to run a household. So she very nearly got fired over it but she stood up to them and made a big fuss. And while she didn't carry the day she did gain a lot of friends that way.

JE: So as we move into this story she's fully capable of standing up for what she believes in.

PL: Not only that, let me go back to when she was in the school at OSU. We still had segregated schools everywhere in Oklahoma at that point. And there was one teacher that she took a class from that a black girl had signed up for. And when she came in to sit down in the classroom the teacher told her she could not sit in the classroom.

When the girl protested, she told her she could sit outside the door and listen to the lectures.

Mother got up at that point, picked up her chair, and went outside the door, and she said, "If she can't listen to the lectures in the classrooms then I won't either."

The teacher eventually gave in.

JE: That's a great story to hear.

PL: My aunt, Mother's twin sister, was so proud of that. Mother was proud of it herself. But my Aunt Clara, who was her twin, her redheaded twin, I should mention, liked to tell that story.

Chapter 04 – 4:17
May 8, 1973

John Erling: The date was May 8, 1973. There was a newspaper with the headline: $450 Million N Plant Planned for Inola. And as I understand, somebody had placed it on her desk or in her chair.

Patricia Lemon: Yes. At that point, she was the head nurse at the nursing home that my father and she built. She went in the office that morning and there it was. She never found out who put it there, but probably it was just somebody who would bring the mail.

JE: PSO had bought nearly two thousand acres through a third party and then they were to convince Inola residents of the wonders of nuclear power. PSO invited the community to a get-together and a progress report. That's when they started talking—

PL: So you realize this was at the time when Eisenhower was touting Atoms for Peace. This was not too long after World War II, which ended with the Nagasaki and Hiroshima bombings. A lot of the research and construction for those bombs went on in a place called Oak Ridge in Tennessee.

Mother had read stories about frogs with five legs and, you know, other deformities and other deformities in other species as well. So she thought to herself, "If that's going to happen to my grandchildren and my children, it's going to be a disaster. So that's part of what started her off.

But she decided to go down and see the site. There was an open gate, so she went onto the site in Inola and saw how beautiful it was and how terrible it was going to be if it were destroyed. They had already broken ground, at that point. There had been this big ceremony with the governor and so forth. The groundbreaking ceremony where they cut the ribbon and so forth, commonplace back then.

JE: The name Black Fox Nuclear Plant, where did they come up with the name Black Fox?

PL: It's just a translation of the Cherokee name of the town. Inola means Black Fox in Cherokee.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

PL: She decided she had to do something about it but, at that point, she had not gotten the courage, she had never had anything that she had to fight for, except in terms of her own personal life.

JE: Let's say here, you talked about Eisenhower and Atoms for Peace.

PL: Yeah.

JE: I have the definition here, "Nuclear power comes from the process of nuclear fission or the splitting of atoms and the resulting controlled nuclear chain reaction creates heat, which is used to boil water, produce steam, and drive turbines that generate electricity." So that's the nub then of what we're talking about.

PL: That's the nub of it.

JE: And why it—

PL: And that is also where the interstate highway system came from, because to transport those reactors and the materials that were used in them. It required very heavy trucks and the road system was not set up for that. So Eisenhower, as a good general, realized that he had to do the infrastructure for it.

It just breaks my heart, I mean, I am very sorry that he built the Atoms for Peace Initiative, but at the same time, I have to say that the interstate highway system was a great triumph and I am very sorry that we have allowed it to deteriorate as much as we have. I think we have got to start realizing that we are in the war with ourselves and do something about it.

Chapter 05 – 5:43
Water in Gas Tank

John Erling: After Carrie saw this land that was so beautiful and she couldn't understand how the utility company could restore the land back to its original state, this obviously bothered her. Is that when she phoned PSO President R. O. Newman and she asked, "Is the issuance of the construction permit cut and dried?"

And he said, "Nothing can stand in the way of the completion of the nuclear power plant."

Patricia Lemon: Well, that was what he thought and you can't blame him for thinking that because after the war we had all gotten so accustomed to doing whatever had to be done to win the war that nobody thought you should ever go against a government program. And there was no real venue for her to do anything about it.

So she decided to go to a Claremore City Council meeting and talk to the councilors about a project. Because it was for Rogers County and they would need to approve the water permits and so forth. So she got up in that meeting and asked the council to go against the issuance of that permit.

The chairman said, "Who are you?"

And she said, "I'm Carrie Barefoot Dickerson."

He said, "What do you think you know about this?"

And she said, "I have done my research. I know what I'm talking about."

He said, "Do you represent a group?"

And she said, "Yes." She just made this up. It hadn't occurred to her she would need this. She said, "I represent a group called Citizens Action for Safe Energy." Actually, I'm not sure that was the original name but that was, I think, turned into eventually.

She was sure that God was going to strike her dead for lying. Like she said that as soon as that came out in the paper she started getting phone calls. And within a day, she had 150 members of the group.

JE: I think in that moment she actually borrowed the name from activist Ralph Nader who used that as well.

PL: Oh, he did?

JE: Right.

PL: Well, I know he came to a lot of their meetings.

JE: We should say before she actually went public she actually did about three months of research on her project.

PL: She did. She got every piece of information she could find in the public realm. But then she realized that she could ask the federal government for documentation. And she got as much of that as she could as well.

JE: So she was ready to speak publicly, but then her husband, Robert, said, "You can't speak against big business in the government. Your life could be in danger." Carrie was fifty-six years old at the time. Robert was a little nervous for her.

PL: Well, he had a right to be. That was at the time when Karen Silkwood was killed. Most of us still believe that that was a murder, a judicial murder, not an accident.

JE: Karen Silkwood, she was a chemical technician labor union activist.

PL: Yeah.

JE: She was killed in an automobile accident November 13, 1974. She had actually found plutonium contamination on her person and in her home and she was on her way to talk about this with a *New York Times* reporter.

Let me just point out here, the Silkwood story became an Academy Award-nominated film, *Silkwood*, portrayed by Meryl Streep.

PL: She would have died anyway from the plutonium contamination. It was such a tragedy that she was killed. You know, part of the reason those of us who were at the time believed that Karen was killed is that Mother had been driving in Tulsa, and at that time it was not nearly as crowded as it is now. But she was on one of the major streets when her car just stopped.

When they took it to the shop they discovered that she had had water put in her gas tank so that it would stop the car from going. And she very, very almost didn't escape being killed herself by a car ramming her.

And there were a couple of other incidents of that sort, so we think that there was somebody, possibly in the FBI, at that point, although things have changed a lot since then, putting together a plan to kill off the people who protested.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

PL: So Daddy was not wrong, but he was right that they did need something to replace it because we do need power. And one can only respect OGNE and the other companies that have followed their example for understanding that and understanding they needed to give their owners—the citizens who owned stock in the company—some kind of return on their investment.

Chapter 06 – 4:27
Oklahoma Farmers Union

John Erling: When Robert was nervous about this he came on board and he felt that the two of them needed to have an alternative to nuclear power. So they went to Stillwater, I guess Oklahoma A&M at the time—

Patricia Lemon: Yes.

JE: ...to see if there was any research on wind power or solar power.

PL: They talked to a professor, a Dr. Allison, I believe it was, who couldn't offer them anything to fulfill their needs. But Daddy was really, really upset by the fact that he and his father had been the greatest supporters of the Oklahoma Farm Mission and Grandpa had been a national officer.

But when Daddy asked them to come out against the nuclear power plant they laughed him off the stage. And he was very, very hurt by that because he had worked so hard for them.

JE: Uh-huh (affirmative). This obviously made both of them angry and Carrie angry and weak, actually, and it began to affect her health. And she knew she needed to be strong. And she knew that bearing a grudge would defeat her efforts.

PL: Yeah.

JE: So she learned to fight the issue and not the people.

PL: That's right. I didn't understand this until many years later but Mother, when she was a young woman had wanted to be a missionary, which is not uncommon among young people of her generation I think, in Oklahoma. But when she got married she put that to one side. But that sort of underlay all of her understanding about how to do things.

So she would go and pray about things for hours and hours. She and Daddy were Methodists, and of course, Methodists have a principle that you do all the good you can all the time you can.

I was not a Methodist myself but I respect everything that the Methodists try to do.

JE: Carrie then went out, handed out copies of very important information. She started talking to everyone she met. She went to the newspaper, the *Claremore Progress*; the editor, Don Dodd listened but did not support and he actually editorialized against her.

PL: Yes, which was a disappointment but not unexpected.

JE: She went to the headquarters of any organization to get their support. Then one day, she knocked on the door of the Tulsa Indian Emphasis Program and she met with people who became her friends.

PL: I know she did that but I never knew them myself.

JE: PSO sent a formal request of approval of the proposed plan to each city council within a twenty-five-mile radius of Inola.

PL: Yes, and that was when she went to the city council and asked for them to vote against it.

JE: She did that on September 4th of 1973, the Claremore City Council. The council actually voted to send the representative to the Oklahoma Corporation Commission.

PL: Yes. There was a member of the Oklahoma Corporation Commission who grew up in Claremore.

JE: Yes, that was Norma Eagleton.

PL: Norma Hadad Eagleton. She was a senior when I was an eighth-grader. She was in the senior play that year and I just thought she was the most glamorous person I had ever seen in my life. But she followed her father's example and became a lawyer and wound up on the Corporation Commission.

JE: There was a headline in the *Claremore Progress*, "Council Reviews Inola Plant Opposition." So Carrie started what she did later on just to slow the process down. PS—

PL: That whole thing started on that day.

JE: ...PSO spokesman admitted they did not have a good solution to the waste of building nuclear power. And the newspaper—

PL: And of course, they never came up with one.

JE: And the newspaper article launched the crusade in the organization. Then the radio station from Altus called and wanted the name of the organization, how many belonged to it. She said, "About a hundred," and that's when she used the case in which she borrowed from Ralph Nader.

And when this went out over the airwaves reporters from newspapers and radio, television stations called from all over the country. And that's what launched it nationally, right?

PL: Absolutely.

Chapter 07 – 4:31
God Made Rattlesnakes

John Erling: Carrie met opposition from acquaintances of hers and said she shouldn't oppose the government and to oppose nuclear power. They said, "God made uranium for us to use. When you oppose its use you're opposing God."

Patricia Lemon: Absolutely. You know, I had forgotten about this until you brought it up, but after Mother died one of her friends, I was talking with her about global warming and this woman said to me, "It says in Genesis that God will not destroy the earth again as long as

the rainbow is in the sky." And she said, "That is a promise from God, so believing in global warming is against God."

It didn't occur to me till later but I'm quite sure Mother, if she had been around and would have answered, "God may have promised not to destroy the world himself but he did not promise that we would not destroy ourselves."

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

PL: Because Mother was very good at thinking on her feet and with any repost, you know, the thing about God made rattlesnakes?

JE: Right, her response—

PL: That—

JE: ...to God made uranium, she said, "And God made rattlesnakes too."

PL: Exactly.

JE: She—

PL: I thought that was very witty of her.

JE: And then she had threatening phone calls, "Put your apron on, go back to the kitchen where you belong."

PL: I don't know whether you are aware of it but back in that time women were mostly chattels in Oklahoma, at least, pretty much all over the country, I think, at least in farming communities.

When Mother was teaching at Pleasant View she could not open a bank account for herself. She could not write a check for herself. Every time she wanted to write a check she either had to get my grandfather or my father or both of them to countersign it. And the account had to be in Grandpa's name.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

PL: Women were not allowed their own accounts.

JE: Many of these phone calls came from what she felt were stockholders in PSO.

PL: I think that is probably true because that was a point when Oklahoma had for so many decades depended on oil for its revenues. Those companies themselves decided they wanted to move over to nuclear power. So the stockholders felt like they were losing if the plant wouldn't be built.

JE: Well, she would invite them to her home to learn more and that was the last time that she would hear from any of them.

PL: That's true and in many cases, but some people just felt that their money was more important than anything else in the world.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative). Even friends and teachers that she had taught with would walk the other way when they saw her coming. And so she was feeling ostracized.

PL: She was ostracized. She was invited to speak at a Chamber of Commerce meeting in Claremore at one point. And she was treated so rudely she never forgot it.

It shocked me because most of the people who were in that meeting I knew myself as a teenager and thought better of them. I think they should have been ashamed of themselves and I hope they were.

JE: Well, she felt that people thought that if she was a radical, which is what they thought, she knew she wasn't and so she pressed on.

PL: You see, it depends on how you define a radical. A radical means basically a rooted person; a person who is concerned about the roots of things. And Mother was concerned about the roots of things. So if you look at it that way she was a radical.

JE: And then she went on, she rented a booth at the Rogers County Fair.

PL: Yeah.

JE: Not everyone would agree with her, of course. But she got pushed back.

PL: The thing about democracy is you don't expect everybody to agree with you. You expect them to debate and to think for themselves based on the evidence they have. So she felt that she had a responsibility to give them the evidence they needed.

Chapter 08 – 4:40
Carrie's Partners

John Erling: Carrie was not alone because as she began to make news and headlines she met Eileen Younghein from Oklahoma City.

Patricia Lemon: Yes.

JE: And the two of them were—

PL: Eileen and her husband were wonderful.

JE: Then she met Tom Dalton who became an effective speaker, an attorney.

PL: She was always a little doubtful about Tom because so far as she was concerned, a person who was advocating for something should be able to dedicate everything they had to it, as she had. But Tom had a family to take care of and had a business to support and so she kept having to mortgage pieces of property to pay his fees.

But Tom was very talented. He was an excellent lawyer and very good at speaking, so he was a good advocate for them, so she called—she needed to do whatever it took to get him.

JE: Let me just insert here that insurance companies refused to insure nuclear power plants. There was a study made by the Brookhaven Laboratories in 1957, and the study predicted that within 15 miles of a small reactor meltdown 3,400 people would be killed. And within 45 miles, 43,000 people could be injured. Damage could cost $7 billion, and an area the size of Maryland could be contaminated. If there was a meltdown many of thousands

would die. Symptoms would be bleeding gums, vomiting, infants would be born with severe deformities and retardation, leukemia and other forms of cancer. And the Atomic Energy Commission concealed that report.

PL: Yes, but all you have to do to figure out whether that report was accurate or not is to look at Fukushima and the meltdown there, which has caused so much damage to Japan and is still causing damage to fisheries on the West coast.

JE: So while Carrie's out proclaiming her opposition PSO moved ahead with the project. A 350-foot weather monitoring tower was installed.

PL: Yeah.

JE: St—

PL: There was one installed around the same time in the city of Montague, Massachusetts, because they wanted to build a power plant on the Montague Plains. And that was what led to Samuel Lovejoy's direct action.

Well, Mother would not have supported that in Claremore or in Inola, but she might have considered it. She respected Sam a great deal. They talked down the tower they put up in the Montague Plains.

JE: Students from the University of Tulsa and OSU had been hired to stay in the river to count the populations of birds and marine life. Botany students were set to recording every species of plant life. PSO needed two years of weather data.

PL: Yeah.

JE: And she met Sam Lovejoy from Massachusetts. What did that mean to her cause?

PL: Well, Sam Lovejoy, who had been in a very similar situation in Massachusetts decided that he was not going to let that tower stand. I don't know what he was using to bring it down but he chopped the tower base down and it fell over.

He was arrested and taken to court. He defended himself by saying that he was defending the state and the country and the world. And was never put in jail, to my knowledge.

JE: Did he come here to Oklahoma to help her?

PL: I don't know actually what the interaction between them was—

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative), right.

PL: ...but I know on the original Earth Day, Mother came to Massachusetts and went to the Earth Day celebration at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. She was passing out literature. And as she sat there she was making a quilt to make money for the Clamshell Alliance, which Sam eventually became part of. But that was later.

That was when she met Sam and the quilt that she made was put on a standard and flown above the heads of the protestors in New Hampshire.

Chapter 09 – 4:17
PSO Follows Carrie

John Erling: PSO sent their employees into the community to promote the project. And Carrie traveled Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri, and Kansas and showed the film, *What's Wrong with America's Reactors?* She would show that several times a week at schools, colleges, civic and church groups.

Patricia Lemon: If she could get access to them, yes.

JE: Now I understand that PSO watched every move of Carrie's life. They would send two people to her meetings and the same woman all the time, but with a different man.

PL: Yeah. Mother respected that. She allowed them to have their say, but she would always respond from her point of view.

JE: I think she called them out one time. She said, "Are you from PSO?" and the woman finally admitted that she was from PSO.

PL: Absolutely, and that was a real triumph. She didn't try to humiliate the woman, she just wanted to make it clear that that was where she was speaking from.

JE: In the spring of 1974, she started a letter-writing campaign, phone-calling campaign to our state legislators. All this was costing money, of course.

PL: Yeah.

JE: She obtained twenty thousand names from several magazines. She set up an assembly line for cutting and pasting names. Paid five thousand dollars for printing and folding twenty thousand copies of the letter and the postage.

PL: Well, you know, at that time, there was a popular magazine called *Organic Gardening*. It was the publisher of *Organic Gardening* that gave her that list. Mother was good at organizing people to get things done.

JE: The governor at the time and state senators were deluged with letters, phone calls. Then she organized demonstration in front of PSO building. She was taking lots of action.

Meanwhile, Senator Bellman was encouraging companies to consider Camp Gruber as a nuclear power plant site.

PL: Camp Gruber is a disgrace from top to bottom. The pollution that was left there for the surrounding people to deal with is terrible. Since it was a military installation there was nothing much anybody could do about it.

JE: Senator Bellman said Carrie was the "stubbornest person he had ever met."

PL: She took that as a compliment.

JE: (laughing) Right. Eventually, CASE members, Carrie, believed they had no choice but to intervene in Black Fox hearings.

PL: Yeah.

JE: And then Carrie and others were told that Atomic Energy Law does not allow an intervener to prevent construction of a nuclear power plant. "If your goal is to stop Black Fox you'll be wasting your time, your energy, and your money. You cannot stop a nuclear power plant."

Now a lot of people might have given up and quit when they heard those words. But they seem to have empowered her.

PL: Well, she realized that she couldn't throw herself halfway into it. She had to throw herself all the way into it. That's when she talked to people in Washington about getting intervener status and succeeded. But she decided that she was not going to listen to people who said she couldn't do it. But she was going to do it and that's all there was to it. That was Mother all over.

JE: And she would prove that Black Fox Electricity would be too expensive for people to buy. I guess she thought, "If they don't fear their life as a result of the power plant imploding, then let's talk about the expense." She would prove it would be too expensive for people to buy.

PL: The expense was the real issue because PSO was spreading the federal syllabus about how nuclear energy would be so cheap they would be giving it away. And I'm sure they believed that was the case. And it should have been possible for that to be the case, if the nuclear power plant were to say we're supposed to, and if they had not been so expensive to build.

But Mother was determined to make them so expensive they would be unbillable. And she was right to do that.

Chapter 10 – 3:23
Church Meeting

John Erling: In 1976, PSO invited every minister in the Tulsa area to a luncheon, January 14th, at the First Presbyterian Church. So she invited the same ministers ahead of the luncheon on January 7th and served lunch that was made in the nursing home kitchen. (laughs)

Patricia Lemon: She was no fool.

JE: No, she wasn't. She was not. The PSO luncheon, they brought in big speakers from across the country, and yet, all the speakers agreed with Carrie that one great problem is spent nuclear fuel storage.

PL: Absolutely. And as everybody knows by now, that is a problem that we are still wrestling with.

JE: Yes.

PL: And we will continue to wrestle with it until all of that spent fuel finishes all of its half life, because no matter where we try to store it there seems to be no place that is secure enough from earthquakes and other damage to withstand and make the storage safe. As we have been seeing in Southern Washington and Northern Oregon, the nuclear materials stored there are still contaminating the whole area.

JE: They're talking now about storing that in Nevada.

PL: They've been thinking that for a long time, but people in Nevada don't want it so it hasn't been approved yet.

JE: Right. In *USA Today* this morning, July 27, 2017, it says, "At the end of May the owners of Three Mile Island, the Pennsylvania nuclear plant whose meltdown in '79 hardened the resolve of anti-nuclear activists and inspired a host of industry regulations announced plans to close by 2019." So Three Mile Island was part of the mix as Carrie was carrying on.

PL: It was, and I am so glad they finally came to their senses and decided to shut them down. That is an area prone to, so it should never have been approved to begin with.

JE: In Kansas there is a waterway called Wolf Creek and it flows into the Neosho River, which flows into Oklahoma's Grand Lake.

PL: Yes.

JE: Carrie learned that a nuclear plant was to be built on the creek. She went to the courtroom hearing, I understand, but the plant went on line anyway in September of 1985.

PL: Well, she didn't have the infrastructure to fight it.

JE: Yeah. She learned that few people were willing to spend as much time and energy as she did in the effort to stop Black Fox.

PL: I would say that she also learned that not as many people would be willing to spend the money, but that is not actually true. Because people would donate their last dollar to her sometimes to help pay for the legal fees. It was pitiful when she would get a letter back from somebody she had sent a request to, saying, "I have no money. I am about to starve. I am praying for you but that is all I can do."

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

PL: There were a lot of people like that.

Chapter 11 – 5:48
Bills Mounted Up

John Erling: The bills were mounting up so Carrie and Robert, your father, decided to give up the nursing home so that she could devote full time to the Black Fox fight.

Patricia Lemon: Yeah.

JE: And after all bills were paid they were left with two hundred thousand dollars.

PL: Daddy had to have open heart surgery.

JE: Yes. And when he did, a few days before he went into the hospital, he wrote a check for three thousand dollars and said, "Carrie, we're almost bankrupt. You'll have to find another way to finance the battle."

PL: Yeah.

JE: But that two hundred thousand dollars was loaned or given to the cause for legal and expert witness fees and duplicating. She was left with no income except Social Security.

PL: That's right. So far as copying is concerned there were some supporters in Tulsa who would allow her to use their copy machines.

My youngest sister, Mary, would take the documents in, make the copies, and then return the originals. She would spend hours Xeroxing. I don't know what Mother would have done without Mary. Mary worked so hard.

JE: While this is going on, your father, Robert, has surgery, and he receives a new artificial aortic valve.

PL: Yeah.

JE: She has that on her mind as well. She had a dream about a sunburst quilt and she began quilting "Sun in Splendor," and would raffle it off.

PL: She decided that she had to do something, so she prayed and prayed and prayed and then when she went to sleep that night, she had this dream of the sunburst quilt.

JE: She said if she was going to raffle it off she was told she could go to jail for the raffle. (laughing)

PL: She was told that because it was considered gambling and still is in so many places. But—

JE: What did she finally do?

PL: … she went ahead and did it because her friends in government told her that they would probably never prosecute her for it.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

PL: So she sold raffle tickets. And that quilt is now in the home of a woman in Amherst, Massachusetts.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound). In the summer of 1977, there was a water crisis in Tulsa's water system. They asked for voluntary water conservation. Now PSO wanted to buy water from the city of Tulsa, cooling water for Black Fox, but the Tulsa commissioners delayed a vote on that.

PL: Wisely. I don't know whether you remember, probably five years ago, there was a request from Dallas, Texas, to take over all the water in the Red River because they didn't have enough water to drink.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

PL: That was a really big deal for quite a while. Because water is life when you come right down to it.

JE: Yes.

PL: Without water none of us would be alive. And none of our fruits or vegetables or animals would be alive, so we would have no food and we would not be able to survive ourselves. Water is a crucial matter. And I'm so glad the Tulsa people decided to refuse that. And that the Corporation Commission recognized the importance of it.

JE: Ten days before the hearing reconvened, the water contract between the city of Tulsa and PSO was finally signed. But then a bombshell happened, before the adjournment of the hearing Tom Dalton said, "The city does not have any water. And without the Oologah water there is no water available for Black Fox Station."

PL: That was a huge thing when he said that. Nobody had really looked at it seriously. Tom was a brilliant man. He knew where to look.

JE: It was like he saved it till the very end; let everything proceed and then there was a bombshell.

PL: He had a great sense of drama and he used it to the nth degree.

JE: That ended any contracts between PSO and the city of Tulsa.

PL: Yeah.

JE: It's interesting, the delay, delay, delay factor. Because Carrie and her friends were able to cause the Nuclear Regulatory Commission hearings to last more than eighteen months. And normally the hearing would last about a week.

PL: That is something we all need to take to heart because we have to protect ourselves. We can't just let them roll over us.

JE: At the hearing, about eighty CASE members made statements, and she used this quote for inspiration: "What the mind can conceive and believe, it can achieve." She hung on to those words.

PL: Yeah. I went to that hearing. I had not been to others before because I didn't live there at the time. So I was able to hear all of those people standing up. I know that they were exhausted for waiting around for their turn. But I had been to other hearings and understood that's what happened in a legal hearing.

JE: Yeah. As we said, quilts became a revenue source and then concerts. There were many musicians who came in as a fundraiser for CASE and the Silkwood family too, Jackson Brown, there were other musicians too.

PL: Bonnie Raitt, Bonnie Raitt was wonderful.

JE: Bonnie Raitt, yeah.

PL: She remained a friend of Mother's for years afterward. She would still have been if Mother were alive. Actually, one of her last concerts in Tulsa, Mother went to and congratulated Bonnie on her good work.

Chapter 12 – 5:20
Sunbelt Alliance

John Erling: As we think about in '73, when Carrie saw that headline, it was by herself. By 1978, there were three anti-nuclear groups working to defeat Black Fox: CASE, your mother's group, Citizens Actions for Safe Energy; there was Citizens Against Black Fox; and CARE, which was Citizens Against Radioactive Exposure. That came out of the University of Tulsa, students who came up with that acronym. All—

Patricia Lemon: You know, that was a time when students realized they had a responsibility and they understood what was going on. So they decided to act on their responsibilities.

I was just watching on PBS last night a move about Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco and I know there are an awful lot of people who still feel that that was a terrible thing. I think it was disappointing because people are not able to maintain that level of passion for any length of time. But I think it released a lot of us to think for ourselves when we had been told all of our lives we had to do what we were told.

JE: All these three groups that I just mentioned, all came together then under the name of Sunbelt Alliance.

PL: Yes.

JE: And students would join in demonstrations. Talk to this because civil disobedience in Oklahoma did not play very well with the citizens.

PL: No, it did not. Mother knew it would not so she tried to discourage them from the extremes of what they were doing, but eventually she did, in fact, walk in a protest march down Main Street in Tulsa. She said that when she went to that she was feeling herself like she was a criminal. You're not supposed to speak out, but she knew she had to speak out. So she went along with them and she carried her own sign. Eileen Younghein was plain instrumental in that because she encouraged Mother.

JE: Well, they went to the site and demonstrated at the Black Fox site.

PL: Yes, they had to go over a fence. But some of the people who remained with Mother up until the end and are now a part of the Carrie Dickerson Foundation were among the protestors of the demonstration.

JE: As a matter of fact, I have a picture here where actor Wes Studi carries an American flag as he helps lead nearly four hundred protestors and journalists on a march to Black Fox Nuclear Power Plant construction site on October 7, 1978, when many of them were arrested for trespassing.

However, the project moves on. Limited work authorization was granted on July 26, 1978, and groundbreaking ceremony—

PL: Yes.

JE: …August 14, 1978.

PL: And pretty much everybody thought it was all over then. But Mother felt she couldn't give up, she had to keep going. So she roused everybody else up.

JE: Meanwhile, the bills were mounting up and eventually your mother and dad had no money and they had to mortgage a farm.

PL: Well, mortgaging the farm was very difficult. She mortgaged it to some supporters from Tulsa who had money. One of her supporters was the daughter of former Senator Robert S. Kerr, who had married a Russian Orthodox priest and started a retreat community. She was a good friend of Mother's.

I'm not sure where the money came from but I do know that a number of people stepped up and took mortgages on the farm. I was a little indignant myself, I have to say, that they gave her mortgages instead of just donating. But people do what they can do.

JE: Right. The amount of money she received on the mortgage was $26,500.

PL: Which is not enough to do much of anything with.

JE: Was it her uncle's farm?

PL: Oh, her father had been born and grown up in Blanchard. His brothers were supposed to have given the proceeds of his farm to his widow but instead they took it themselves. And this particular uncle had been so ashamed of that for all of his life that he decided to deed his farm in Blanchard to Mother and her twin sister.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

PL: But my uncle Marvin Barefoot, who was born shortly before their father died, Mother decided he needed some of the proceeds too. So she sold off parcels of that land to people who were interested, especially in organic farming. There were some really wonderful people among them. So she had a revenue stream coming in payments monthly, and that was what kept her going for a number of years.

Chapter 13 – 4:53
Carrie's Husband Dies

John Erling: Then as of February 10th, 1979, there had been a two-year delay, thanks to Carrie and her friends. But while that's happening then her husband, your father, dies May 18th, 1979. That's on top of all this.

Patricia Lemon: Yeah. Poor Daddy. He was a blue baby, I don't know whether you know that phrase. It was common when I was growing up—a child who had a defective heart that would occasionally just turn blue and pass out.

Daddy had been at the nursing home. It was a rainy day. There were puddles everywhere. My grandmother's sister who was a resident at the nursing home had dementia and was always trying to escape and go back to the family farm in Sagea. But she was so unable to figure out where she was that she would just walk any direction at all. In fact, one day they found her at Lake Claremore, in the park there.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

PL: But Daddy saw her sneak out the door and so he ran after her. In the process, he stumbled and fell with his face in a pool of water. Grandmother happened to be looking out the window when that happened, so she ran out and picked up his head and kept his nose out of the water. That was when they realized they had to do the operation.

As you may or may not know, anybody who has a heart valve operation or any kind of heart operation generally has to take something like rat poison for the rest of their lives to keep their blood thin enough that it doesn't start clotting and give them a stroke. Well, Daddy had recovered and was doing amazingly well when they decided that he had to have his teeth pulled because they were in such bad condition. But to do that they had to take him off the Coumadin.

As soon as he was taken off the Coumadin he had a stroke, which eventually killed him. When I got there, which was probably a day later, Daddy was a great jokester and he was making gestures with his face to make jokes. I was always so proud of Daddy; he was the bravest man I think I ever knew.

But I was with him when he died, and I have to say, I was so disappointed with the doctors because they wanted to put him on life support and they tried to guilt Mother into doing it. They would say to her, "You're killing him, you're making him drown in his own body fluids if you don't put him on life support."

I had to remind her that Daddy had always told us that he didn't want to ever go on life support, because it's such a painful thing to do. Eventually, she remembered and agreed with me and told them no. But the last few days, his mouth was so dry and so uncomfortable I spent most of my time standing beside him, moistening his face and his throat. But I think all of us, including Daddy, were relieved when he finally stopped breathing. It was a real blow.

He had been the love of Mother's life. It was almost impossible for her to get past that. Especially after one of his Baptist cousins came down from Missouri and preached a sermon at his funeral, saying that he was in hell now, which was too bad because he could have been a Baptist.

JE: He said that the was in hell?

PL: Yeah. Because he was a Methodist and not a Baptist.

JE: I'm keeping myself from laughing.

PL: Well, I would laugh but it was a cruel thing to have said.

JE: Oh, very cruel. Yes.

PL: But I do remember my grandfather telling me about going to a revival meeting at the Claremore Baptist Church and being told that nobody but Baptists were going to heaven. And Grandpa always used to tell me—I decided then and there, I didn't want to go myself.

JE: (laughing)

PL: He had a great sense of humor too, but it was not the same kind as the Cherokee sense of humor, which is what Daddy had.

Chapter 14 – 5:07
PSO Scraps Black Fox

John Erling: But Carrie carried on and, of course, there were many, many hearings, details that we're not getting into, but Corporation Commission Hearing was set September 13, 1981. The Corporation Commissioners Hap Baker, Bill Dawson, and Norma Eagleton. Nine weeks of hearings, right?

Patricia Lemon: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: Were you in any of those hearings?

PL: I was not.

JE: Well—

PL: Because I had small children and I had to get back to them.

JE: That started September 13, 1981; the hearings continued until finally January 15th, 1982. "PSO Western Farmers Electric Cooperative, an Associated Electric Coop, Should Not Proceed with This Project."

And then the Corporation Commission said on February 16th, 1982, the headline: PSO Would Scrap Black Fox.

PL: Yes. And one of the things, I'm not sure whether Mother said it or not, but it's true, the Corporation Commission didn't require PSO to refund Mother's legal expenses, but they did suggest that they do so. You know, there are still people today who believe that Mother was paid millions of dollars by PSO, which is a total falsehood.

JE: Did they pay her anything?

PL: They did. They did what they felt they could do and it was a certainly a help, but it was not anywhere near what she had sacrificed.

JE: Uh-hmm (thoughtful sound). How much did they pay her?

PL: I've forgotten, I think it's in the book.

JE: Actually, Norma Eagleton called to tell Carrie the good news—

PL: Yes.

JE: …that PSO would scrap it, nine years later.

PL: Norma was wonderful.

JE: Carrie writes in the book, "I had said that we would stop Black Fox and that we would prove Black Fox too expensive for people to buy the electricity, and that is exactly how Black Fox was stopped."

PL: That's exactly the true wrap-up of the whole thing.

JE: Then there was a big celebration in Owen Park in Tulsa.

PL: Yeah. Many of the concerts during the fight were there. And, you know, it was the time when most musicians considered themselves hippies and there was a whole lot of marijuana being smoked there, I'm quite sure.

I did go to one of them but Marian, my youngest sister, went to pretty much all of them. And she could announce things.

JE: When Carrie spoke she reminded everyone that Black Fox would not have been stopped had it not been for attorneys Tom Dalton, Joe Farris, and Louis Bullock.

PL: Absolutely true.

JE: I just wanted to read a passage here from when she wrote in her book, and you helped her with it, *Aunt Carrie's War Against Black Fox Nuclear Power Plant*. So she writes, "Too many of us, because we have never participated over the long haul in public debate and have never held government office assume that by virtue of their positions public officials have all the answers. For our government to continue to work we must stop indulging ourselves in this kind of intellectual and moral sloth. We must take responsibility for our own democracy or soon we will cease to have one. We will then be at the complete mercy of those whose only motive is greed." Carrie's right.

PL: Heck, yeah. Did you hear Senator McCain talking?

JE: I did.

PL: On Capitol Hill? I thought that speech was probably the best thing he had ever done. He was saying the same thing Mother was, only in his own words. I was really impressed with that. He is a good man.

JE: Can you recap what he said for the sake of history here?

PL: He said, "We have got to get together. We have got to go back to the regular way of doing things where we listen, we gather evidence, and we debate before we make a decision."

JE: He came back to vote on a healthcare, which is not our topic here, but for those who will be listening for years to come—

PL: That was a great sacrifice on his part.

JE: Yes. As life moved on for Carrie, what did she do for a living?

PL: Daddy had bought the Presbyterian carriage house and had it shipped out to the farm and put a foundation under it. But she finished it off and made it into a six-bedroom place where she could have people come and live with her and maybe share expenses. But that didn't work out too well, so she went back to selling vitamins and stuff like that.

JE: Did she continue her quilting?

PL: She continued quilting classes every week. She quilted pretty much to the end.

Chapter 15 – 4:24
Some Never Forgave

John Erling: Carrie died November 17, 2006. She was eighty-nine years old. Were you with her there at the end?

Patricia Lemon: When she died? No I wasn't. I had just seen her that evening, but I know she called her sister and just about everybody else she cared about that evening to make sure she talked to them. So I think she had some kind of insight about it.

The only thing I remember of that conversation was that she asked me, "What do you think of me?"

I told her—I wish I had realized it was the last time she was ever going to ask it, I would probably have said it better—but I said to her, "You're the most courageous person I know. Maybe I should have been brought up by an abusive stepfather and I would have more courage."

JE: She had an abusive stepfather?

PL: She did but she wouldn't put any of that stuff in her book.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

PL: Aunt Clara had put a lot of it in hers.

JE: Her twin sister, Clara—

PL: Yes?

JE: Was she very supportive of Carrie through the entire cause?

PL: She was. In fact, she allowed Mother to use a lot of their money that should have gone to her.

JE: How old was Clara when she died?

PL: She, I believe, was ninety-three, it's only been recently.

JE: So as we conclude our interview with you, Patricia, I repeat again the headlines on this day of recording, 7/27/17, in the front page of the *USA Today*, "Nuclear Plant Closures Send Towns into Crisis."

And in the *Tulsa World*, same date, "PSO Announces $1.3 Billion Wind Energy Investment."

PL: People in Inola, a few of them, never forgave her. Many of her strongest supporters were from Inola, but people who had been counting on money from PSO, living in Inola, were furious and some of them never forgave her.

JE: How did she handle that?

PL: She continued to treat them the way she always had. She would be polite to them because she understood why they felt that way. And she had some sympathy with that, but not enough to change her behavior.

JE: For those who want more details, it's a very interesting story, they ought to go to the book, *Aunt Carrie's War Against Black Fox Nuclear Power Plant*, by Carrie Barefoot Dickerson, with you, Patricia Lemon.

Everybody is asked, "How do we want to be remembered?" What are your thoughts as you remember your mother today?

PL: My mother was probably one of the very bravest people I know, aside from my father, probably *the* bravest. And she was actually a forerunner for desegregation and for feminist thoughts, you know. Women didn't have much freedom back then but Mother decided she was a human being, therefore, she should be treated as a human being, not as a chattel. So she was way ahead of her time, is the major thing. And she was more often right than wrong.

JE: We can add her to the list of those who are listed under "Profiles in Courage."

PL: Absolutely.

JE: If I were talking to your mother today that she would give advice to young people, people in college, people graduating, what do you think she would say to them?

PL: Follow your conscious. Respect other people's ideas, but do not be governed by them.

JE: Well, Patricia, I want to thank you for reviewing this story and the legacy that your mother has left. I know how proud you and your family and your children are of this story. And the state of Oklahoma owes a lot, not only the state but the nation as well, to what she did. So, Patricia, thank you very much. I appreciate it very much.

PL: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to talk about my mother. I appreciate it.

Chapter 16 – 0:33
Conclusion

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