Carson Attractions

Dick Carson shares how his family's business became a pillar of entertainment promotion for over 66 years.

Chapter 01 –
Introduction

Announcer: Carson Attractions in Tulsa, Oklahoma, was the foremost ticket facility for events at the Maxwell Convention Center (now Cox Business Center) for over forty years. The story begins with the manager of famed Irish opera singer John Francis McCormack, who is given credit for the beginning of Carson Attractions in 1916. John McCormack was going out on tour for the first time in the United States and his manager wanted someone on the local scene to handle the promotion. The manager knew of Robert Boice Carson who was the music director at Kendall College (which later became the University of Tulsa). Robert Carson said, "We don't know anything about presenting or promoting events," and the manager said, "We will teach you." Eventually, over the years, Robert and Beatrice Carson became involved in promoting many opera singers and choruses who were on tour. The events were held at Convention Hall, 105 West Brady, which became the Tulsa Municipal Theatre, and when the Mayo family bought it, it became the Brady Theatre or "the ole lady on Brady." Richard (Dick) Carson, the grandson of Robert and Beatrice, spent many days in the 1940s as a youngster in Convention Hall while his parents also became involved in the business. And it is Dick Carson who becomes the storyteller of Carson Attractions—which includes Elvis, James Brown, Hello Dolly, ticket scalping, stock car racing, and hard work.

So listen now to the Carson attraction story on *VoicesofOklahoma.com*.

Chapter 02 – 7:52
Carson Attractions 1916

John Erling: Today's date is April 2, 2009. And you are?
Dick Carson: Richard Carson.

JE: State your age and your birth date.

DC: I was born November 11, 1942. I'm sixty-six years old.

JE: What is Carson Attractions?

DC: Well, Carson Attractions started in 1916, with my grandparents. They've been involved over the years in many different phases of the entertainment business, which most people don't realize, there are several phases.

JE: What are they?

DC: All the way from sponsoring and presenting an attraction. Sometimes it's a local attraction, sometimes it's a traveling attraction. Of course, with that you have to plan advertising and promotion of the event so that the general public is aware of it. You sometimes will have advance teams come in for events and it's your responsibility to have the different media outlets respond to their presence in the community. And the whole goal is to end up with a sizeable crowd, depending upon the venue where they're presented, while they're in the community.

Then eventually, Carson Attractions, because it was involved in selling tickets for events that it promoted became also a ticketing agency where it offered its services to traveling entertainment groups and sporting events, where we could take the event itself and not only project it to the public and sell tickets, but we could assist the sponsor or the act itself in planning advertising and promotion in the community, since we were here and they were just sort of passing through.

You end up with the different phases of the entertainment business, of course, being the entertainment itself, but the promotion and presenting it to the public so that you can sell tickets. Or maybe you don't even sell tickets, maybe you just want a good response from the public to attend.

JE: But the public just saw you as you as selling tickets, didn't they? In many ways.

DC: Right, oh, sure. Yes.

JE: Let's go back to your grandfather. His name and your grandmother's name too?

DC: Well, Robert Boice Carson was the music director for Kendall College here in Tulsa, which later became Tulsa University. And he married Beatrice Williams, who had come over at the age of ten from Wales.

While he was at Kendall College, he was approached by the manager of John McCormack, who was a famous, famous opera singer. John McCormack was going out on tour for the first time in the United States. They knew of my grandfather's involvement with the university and Kendall College and they thought, *We'll find someone on the local scene to help present this attraction.*

In those days, the attractions that went out were something that today we don't really know that well. But they were the opera singers. They were the in choruses, they

were more of the fine arts type, they were the rock stars of that era. So they approached my grandfather, and I can remember the story my grandmother used to tell, and if you look these people up on the internet you can find big stories about them. I did because I wasn't that familiar with them.

But my grandfather told John McCormack, "Well, we don't know anything about presenting or promoting an attraction."

And they said, "Don't worry, we will show you, we'll show you how this is done."

So they did. For the first time they got involved in 1916, in presenting this particular show and selling it. I think the tickets probably, some of them were less than a dollar to go see him.

And in those days, for tickets they used to hand-stamp the individual pieces of cardboard. Then they would write in the price of the ticket and then sell these tickets.

Over the years, my grandparents, from that point on, they put their toe in the water and they were involved throughout the community and for many, many years in presenting Enrico Caruso, Galli-Curci, many other opera singers and choruses that would go out on tour for the United States.

Once they had known that the Carsons in Tulsa, Oklahoma, would be the local contact, they worked an arrangement with them, a financial arrangement, I'm sure, I don't know what those terms were, to present these attractions.

That's really how Carson Attractions started and the events were held at Convention Hall at 105 West Brady, which later became Tulsa Municipal Theater, and later became, when the Mayo family bought it, Brady Theater, called the Old Lady of Brady. But it was originally called Convention Hall.

And I spent many days in the '40s there as a young tyke, while my parents, later on, were involved in this business.

JE: They started selling tickets in 1916?

DC: They started presenting these shows.

JE: Presenting them?

DC: Uh-huh (affirmative).

JE: It was more than selling tickets?

DC: That was a sideline then. They were involved in actually presenting and making sure that the stage was correct and everything was right at the theater. Selling tickets was almost secondary to them because presenting such an attraction was the real ego trip, I'm sure.

JE: When did it begin to dawn on them, "Maybe we could make a business out of this?"

DC: Well, actually, they presented attractions on their own and sold tickets for themselves only for many, many years. And twenty-five years later, my grandfather passed away and my father, who at that time was about twenty-one—

JE: His name?

DC: His name was Richard Carson. I'm a junior and he was Richard Carson Sr. He had grown up in the business seeing his parents, what they did to put someone on a stage and have a crowd attend.

So he came into the business with my grandmother, Beatrice, Mrs. Robert Boyce Carson, in 1941. At that particular time, the only business that they had was presenting shows. And also in the '40s, you had World War II. Immediately after World War II there was an influx of a different type of entertainment. You had comedians, Gene Autry was on tour and had his horse, Champion, on the stage.

I was born in 1942, and since they really didn't have a babysitter, or maybe my parents couldn't afford it, I spent a lot of my nights down at Convention Hall while Gene Autry was on the stage or Blackstone the Magician was on the stage.

One time, Blackstone had a pair of comedians that were part of his act, I think the opening act, and they would invite young kids up on the stage and they knew where I was sitting. I knew I was going to go up and I was so excited. And they sat three or four of us down on in a chair. It was kind of a spoof on the kids because they reached in their hat or their bag and pulled out a rabbit and gave it to the little boy next to me.

For me, they reached in the bag and handed me a box of candy. But, unbeknownst to me, they hit the box of candy underneath, candy flew all over the stage, and I started crying. So when the show was over, they came to the office where my father was settling up with Blackstone and they presented me with a white rabbit, which I still remember, it pottied all over the table. All over the forms that they'd filled out to report the sales for the evening.

Chapter 03 – 6:08
Box Office

Dick Carson: And then in Oklahoma, of course, the Broadway show *Oklahoma*, was big. And my parents presented the premiere of *Oklahoma* here in Tulsa. Amazing, for over a one week stand. I went to every performance and I sat up right next to the stage at Convention Hall, or Brady Theater, as we know it today. Right next to the stage, because those seats usually weren't sold.

Before the week was over, I was singing, standing on my feet, let's see, I was probably five or six years old, but I knew every song and was being very flamboyant with my arms as they were singing the songs for *Oklahoma*.

And finally, the manager came and he knew that I was up there, but he said to my dad, "It's so funny, the cast back stage wants to know who is this young tyke sitting on the front row next to the stage, singing the songs right along with us?" And they explained who I was.

But it was a lot of memories.

John Erling: Other there major attractions that would come through that you can remember?

DC: I do remember that Burl Ives did a solo concert for my parents that they presented. He was to give the concert that evening. And that afternoon, he got a Western Union telegram, which was the way they communicated in those days, that his mother had passed away. He was very upset.

My father went to him and said, "Mr. Ives, we can reschedule this if you need to go home."

He said, "No, I need to do this." So he did one of the best concerts, they said, on the stage that Burl Ives ever did.

There were all sorts of acts that they used to have, as I said, Gene Autry went out on tour and would sing his songs. The big finale was to have Champion, his horse, come out on stage.

I remember there was a show in the '60s, called *Damn Yankees*, Broadway show, and my father was negotiating on presenting it here in Tulsa. And as I said, Western Union was the way they communicated in those days. So he called Western Union, which he did all the time to present offers, instead of a fax or telephone, that's how they did it. He offered X number of dollars for *Damn Yankees*. This would be his bid.

They called back and they said, "Mr. Carson, we cannot send this with this word in here."

He said, "Well, that's the name of a show."

And they said, "I'm sorry, that's against our rules of Western Union."

So he just had to put the word "Yankees" in the telegram.

JE: Remember stories and acts that were supposed to come in and they didn't show?

DC: Oh, yeah. Later on, I'm not aware of events that were supposed to take place that didn't when my parents—although I'm sure that they did happen because those things happen. But later on, after my dad died, I came into the business in the '60s, and, of course, we had a slew of attractions.

JE: How old were you then, when you came in?

DC: I was twenty-three. In fact, I used to have people that would come in for the show, I'd been talking with them on the phone for maybe six, eight months before an event came in, and they'd come in and they'd say, "Wow, you're a lot younger than I thought."

But it was so easy for me because I grew up in the business. I used to sit on the living room floor in the '50s, folding brochures that were to go out in a mailing.

My father started Broadway Theater League here in 1958, which was the first series of Broadway shows that were ever here in Tulsa. I can remember handing window cards

or posters around to stores, promoting shows. So I kind of grew up, and I would hear the lingo that was involved with show business.

So when he passed away and I'd just graduated from the University of Arkansas, I came into the business to assist my mother, the way that my father did with his mother back in 1941.

What had happened about a year before my father passed away, the Tulsa Convention Center called the Tulsa Assembly Center in those days, was just being completed. They came to my father and said, "You know, we need a box office because of all these attractions. And a lot of times in cities we have city people to do it. And then we have to train them and get them to know what's involved in selling tickets. Because sometimes you may have several events, ten thousand seats for each event. You may have over a hundred thousand individual tickets for sale at any one time." And he said, "Would you be interested in taking over the box office?"

So that is how Carson Attractions got involved with the city of Tulsa and the Tulsa Assembly Center, going in to that building. At the same time, there were many shows we were presenting, but we offered services to traveling shows. Dick Clark had a slew of rock and rollers that he would put on. Sonny and Cher, the Tulsa Ice Oilers had their office right next to our box office. So it was very easy to handle their tickets also. Leroy McGuirk in wrestling was next to the Oilers in the lobby of the Assembly Center.

We became involved in, and the extension of not just handling tickets for your own shows, but offering a service of selling tickets for traveling events, and also offering them the service of being able to assist them with radio advertising, television advertising, drawing up the newspaper ads.

I can remember drawing up newspaper ads with my pencil back in the mid '60s even, and scheduling that. The business kind of changed at that point.

JE: That was in …?

DC: This was in the '60s, actually, when I came in.

JE: When the connection to the Convention Center?

DC: That's right. The Convention Center was finished in '64. My father passed away in '65, when I was twenty-three, and he had just cemented the deal with the city of Tulsa to go in and serve as their box office.

At that time, I can remember many events. I think the Royal Marine Tattoo, which was a Scottish bagpipe extravaganza was the first show that I was ever involved in in the Convention Center.

Chapter 04 – 8:40
Hello Dolly – Elvis

Dick Carson: In fact, one of the most interesting events that we had, it was a record-breaker in Tulsa, was Carol Channing in *Hello, Dolly!* in 1966. Tulsa Municipal Theater used to be Convention Hall and now is Brady Theater, and it was so dilapidated, it was built in 1915. Well, you can imagine after fifty years it wasn't up to code and the Artists Union had blackballed Municipal Theater many times. We had already put tickets on sale and had posters around, Carol Channing was coming to town. The newspapers and radio, everyone had been, "Oh, a big show coming!"

They sent an advance crew in, after the tickets were on sale, to look at the theater. And they called back to New York, and they said, "Stop this sale. We cannot come in to this theater. You would not believe the treacherous steps that there are. The dressing rooms aren't up to par." I mean, it was an old, old theater in 1966.

Anyway, I was devastated. I mean, the adrenaline flows when you've about half sold out the show at that point, and someone says we can't come in.

They went to David Merrick, who was the producer of *Hello, Dolly!* and told him, "Mr. Merrick, we cannot play Tulsa, Oklahoma."

And he said, almost quote, "I'll be damned if we can't. We just got through playing Vietnam with a red curtain only. We can play Tulsa, Oklahoma, and we will!"

So we had *Hello, Dolly!* We broke the record for any theatrical performance in Tulsa, Oklahoma, at that time. It was a tremendous success and I maintained a relationship with Carol and her husband, or husband then, Charles Lowe, over the years, because of that particular occurrence.

But we had other occasions too. One time, we had the Harlem Globetrotters in the Convention Center. KRMG had sponsored it. We had sold out one performance at 7:30 p.m., it was a Sunday, and it sold out immediately, which we promoted ourselves, the Globetrotters. But this was such an early sellout that we decided to put another one on sale. So we put a 2:30 ticket sale on for the Harlem Globetrotters. Both of them sold out. It was unbelievable. We were just a record-setter again, one of the good moments. You have a lot of bad moments too.

But we got a call, they were in Amarillo with fog and the bus may not be able to make it. That was the morning when they were supposed to be there at 2:30.

Well, they did show up. They started the game about forty-five minutes late. We explained to the audience what was going on. But that was another adrenaline rush right there with the Harlem Globetrotters.

John Erling: Did Elvis appear in the '60s?

DC: Elvis came in to Tulsa; 1956 was his first appearance. Then Elvis did his movies and went to Vegas. We had a very deep relationship with Concerts West at that time. Concerts West was the major rock and roll promoter for the entire United States. They had an arrangement that they made with Jerry Weintraub, a movie producer, to promote Elvis for live concerts, which he had never done for many, many years.

Weintraub, through his connection with Tom Parker, Elvis's manager, took over the entire tour for Elvis Presley in the early '70s.

We were involved locally here, as well as some other cities that Colonel Parker asked us to go into, for the ticket sales on Elvis Presley.

Well, when they contracted with Concerts West and Jerry Weintraub, Concerts West had the expertise to go into all these cities. They'd been promoting shows for several years and we had a very neat relationship with Concerts West. So they contacted us. We put the tickets on sale.

Of course, it sold out with the first mention of Elvis Presley. In those days, we had tremendous lines and we had crowd control problems. And Elvis was a real problem because of the number of people that wanted to go. He did sell out.

JE: So that was '70—

DC: 'Seventy-two. They tried many different experiments of how to handle sales. Because some people were getting injured pushing in some cities. Tulsa was always rather mundane, but other cities were getting out of hand. And these were adult women that were pushing and getting trampled!

Colonel Parker, everybody was kind of fearful of him, but I just had a one-time contact with him. For some reason, I wasn't very intimidated with him and he sensed that and we really got to be—during the time that we were promoting—buddies. Or he'd call, "Hey, Carson," he always had a cigar in his mouth. "Carson, how are the sales going?"

And I'd say, "Well, hi, Colonel, they're going fine. We've got the last tickets we're mailing out today," etc. And they asked us to go into two other cities and handle the sales for them: Mobile, Alabaman, and Jacksonville, Florida, because they wanted to try a new approach for ticket sales. And it didn't work, by the way. Instead of doing tickets on sale to the general public live, they wanted to try and do it totally by mail.

Well, you talk about a mess. Now we went and set them up in Mobile and Jacksonville. We came back to Tulsa, it was also on the tour. This was the second time around for Elvis. And in my mother's home here in Tulsa, we set up an entire separate office from Carson Attractions downtown. We had a crew of eight to ten of our ticket sellers that were experienced in filling orders. And the post office would deliver trays and trays of mail. They filled my mother's kitchen with these trays full of envelopes.

And what happened was, it was disastrous. The mail did not work because what happened is they just at random had to start opening and filling orders. It was a very involved process because you had to log people's name. There was no computer. You had to log people's name, you had to write on their actual request their seat location. You had to mail these back, and if they didn't send an envelope you had to fill out an envelope and put postage on them or send a notice, "You owe us more money for your postage." It was very involved.

And then what happened, after one performance was sold out, they decided in Tulsa to do another performance. So Elvis did another performance and they still had racks and racks of envelopes that had to be opened, because there was money inside. Sometimes money orders, sometimes it was cash, usually a check.

So these gals worked for like two months after Elvis was long gone. Elvis not only left the building, he left Tulsa, Oklahoma, and these gals still were working, opening envelopes and putting a printed notice in there that, "We're sorry we couldn't fill your order," and mailing them back.

That was a very interesting experiment for ticket sales.

JE: And that was the end of that experiment.

DC: That was the end of that experiment. Went back to, of course, live ticket sales before Elvis passed away.

JE: Here you are, a relatively young man, with Colonel Parker. Any other Colonel Parker stories? Did he come with Elvis?

DC: Yes, oh, yes. He was there and he was always in advance of Elvis. My main involvement with Colonel Parker was at the arena when they set the show up several months in advance, before it was ever known, no one knew about it. Everybody was sworn to secrecy. The day or two that he would spend here in Tulsa setting things up. And then on the phone, regularly, like every other day before the show actually went on we did just tremendous business, as you might imagine, with Elvis.

JE: Did you meet Elvis?

DC: Never did meet Elvis, but I did go back into his dressing room one time. He was drinking a Coca Cola. I stood there, the individual Concerts West was handling the show. Went back and was doing something with Elvis but I didn't really meet him at the time.

JE: But you got to see the King?

DC: Got to see the King.

JE: In his dressing room.

DC: Right. And it was amazing. They were short of some security people in front of the stage, so they asked a couple of us from Carson Attractions to go down and sit in front of the stage because they had gals trying and actually climb on the stage. So we sat there.

JE: And that was in what we know as the Convention Center?

DC: Actually, the first show was at the Assembly Center. The second show was in Mabee Center. Mabee Center had been built—

JE: But you sold the tickets for it?

DC: Yeah, we sold all the tickets for that.

Chapter 05 – 6:35
James Brown

Dick Carson: We sold the tickets for most of the shows. We brought computerized ticketing in Tulsa in 1983. Computerized ticketing had really started around the United States in the mid '70s, with a firm called Ticketron, then, of course, Ticketmaster, Tickets.com, everybody emerged. But we sold tickets for most of the attractions. Well, my guys. It's almost like the current BOK Center, here we are in the late 2000s with the BOK Center having so many attractions.

That's the way Tulsa used to be when I came into the business in the '60s and '70s and into the early '80s, until we had an economic downturn. We used to have not only the thirty-two hockey games, but we'd have other sporting events and concerts, four to six a month here in Tulsa, Oklahoma. And the public responded extremely well.

I can remember, we had the Osmonds and Jackson Five. I can't remember if it's the Osmonds or the Jackson Five, I think it might have been the Jackson Five, Dick Clark Productions presented them both here in Tulsa. But one of the mothers of the group wanted to learn to stay on top of business, the ticket end of the business. So they wanted to know if they could send her around to the box office before the box office closed, so she could watch and we would kind of tutor her on what went on. And also explain to her the ways that an act could be cheated of funds. So that was interesting.

And it's strange that I don't remember which mother it was. But she sat there and was really a joy to work with.

John Erling: Did you think that you would be in this business as you were growing up? Or was that an automatic for you?

DC: You know, I don't think that it entered my mind. When I went to the University of Arkansas and majored in economics, if my father hadn't of passed away, I can remember thinking about some other employment opportunities and signing up for some interviews when I was a senior.

And then all of a sudden, my father had a sudden heart attack and it just kind of like changed the direction of where I was going.

JE: So how many years did you have at the University of Arkansas.

DC: Four, 1960 to '64.

JE: Okay, so you graduated from there?

DC: Um-hmm (affirmative), 1964, right.

JE: All right, so that was good training for you?

DC: Right, right. In fact, while I was there, my father put two or three shows over there that I assisted in, the Kingston Trio, the Limelighters, Peter, Paul, and Mary, I helped on the promotion and presentation there for the campus.

JE: All these names that you've mentioned and probably others, did you ever, because you were a promoter, get to connect with any of them and talk to them and get to meet them?

DC: You know, it's really funny, people always would say, "Oh, I bet it was so great to be able to meet all those people." And we could meet anyone we wanted and go back stage. There's pictures of when Karen Gee presented a record crowd at the Assembly Center, now the Convention Center, of Andy Williams and Henry Mancini. We've got pictures of Ron Bloom and myself and Mancini and Andy Williams backstage. So you could do it but at that particular time, when the act is in the building, you're really focused on the business end of it. And even though we would go backstage to do different things and see them, it wasn't a big deal. And it should have been. I mean, here you had the opportunity to have your picture taken or whatever, but it never sunk in, because I think the way I was just raised in the business, it was just like, "So-and-so is on stage. Are you going in?"

"No, I've got to do this here in the office. I've got to take care and distribute these funds." My responsibility was to take in the many, many thousands of dollars that were generated in ticket sales. And we became the clearing house. We sat on that money for months, months, while the tickets were still being sold.

And then the night of the show, we're busy in the box office, we're busy paying out of the receipts the advertising people, the ushers, the stagehands, the security officers. If you had to rent pianos and rent things, you had to pay the music store that you rented the piano.

So we're back there distributing these funds, as well as when it's all done, distributing the balance after we paid ourselves our fee for doing all this work, paying the artists and they went on to another city.

I do remember a funny story about James Brown. James Brown always had some trouble here in Tulsa. Used to come in once a year, and Tulsa was so good, although we had a really small black population—I think it was like 8 percent, not an extremely large one—but they did respond to James Brown. And being his own promoter, he didn't need a full house to come out because he wasn't cutting another promoter in on it, it was his show.

And then he finally started coming in every six months to Tulsa. We'd always handle his tickets and everything. But he always was short of funds. Always was short of funds. But James had a problem on this one show of paying the police officers and the stagehands, they weren't going to work the show, the show wasn't going to go on. I think this was at intermission time.

So I had to go back and talk to James and his people and his entourage back there about, "Please, would I just go ahead and pay them and after the show he'd make it good."

And I said, "James, we can't do this." I'd met him two or three times, he really let his people be involved. But he did call the last shot.

He said, "Please, Mr. Carson, please, we can do it."

I said, "James, not only are you not going to be able to finish your performance, but," I said, "because you still owe money to the City of Tulsa and the rent and everything, they're going to close this door in back, backstage, and prohibit you from going on to your next act."

And he said, "Well, Mr. Carson, it's just very, very hard, we're just short of funds right now."

I said, "Well, I'm sorry, but they're going to close this metal door down behind in the Convention Center and your bus might as well sit out there because you're not going anywhere, at least your equipment isn't."

"Well, okay." And he reached into his pocket and he pulled out the largest wad of one-hundred dollar bills I've ever seen. And he peeled off two or three thousand dollars, whatever it was we needed, and he stuck the rest of this giant wad back into his pocket. And they went on their way.

I can remember a couple of other stories. Some people who are alive now, so I won't go into them. [both laughing]

Chapter 06 – 9:12
Ticket Scalping

John Erling: Ticket scalping, when do you recall that happening? Going back to your grandfather or your father? Do you remember that?

Dick Carson: No, no. I don't remember ticket scalping really occurring of any consequence until probably the late '70s. And it became a real problem.

When we were in the Convention Center box office, the scalpers in those days were a lot different than they are today. We had two or three local scalpers and he would go to the homeless people and give them five dollars to stand in line. He and his two or three

staff would walk the lines to make sure the people didn't leave. He would place them in line to buy tickets. And he would walk up to the window with them, give them the money while they were at the window. He would put the tickets away. He'd give them the five dollars.

Then we decided to try a couple of other tricks, so to speak, to foil the scalpers, and we started wristbands. Not only did we have wristbands, we numbered the wristbands. We would say a show was going on sale on Friday, so we would make it known through the media that Wednesday at noon we would start distributing wristbands. They'd be numbered, starting with 001 and go to whatever number we wanted to print on the wristbands. So whoever came first would get number one.

Well, that didn't really help because we had a tremendous crowd problem. We had thousands showing up to get number one wristband. So then we started another procedure with wristbands where we handed the wristbands out starting at noon on Wednesday, but it was going to be a random drawing of who would be first in line. You could come Thursday afternoon and have just a good chance at being the first purchaser of tickets as the person who was there at noon on Wednesday. It didn't matter, at that particular time, when you receive the wristband. It was put on your wrist, it had a number on it.

Then immediately prior to the tickets going on sale, we had someone from the audience, or a lot of times we had radio people there, we'd let them draw out of box number 1 to 2500 or whatever. Whatever number was drawn, that was the first person in line. And they were waiting. And anyhow, this person would go and from that on, then you started consecutive behind that person. And when number 2000 was given out or in line, then they would start with number 1.

That was a pretty good system and they still use that system today. I noticed at the BOK Center that they use that procedure that we used to use.

The big problem with scalping now is that in computerized ticketing there are all these secondary sellers that sell at exaggerated prices. They obtain tickets and are able to put them on sale for much more than the person would pay. If you paid $150 for a concert ticket, you'll find out within a day of those going on sale, many seats are on sale for $2000, $600.

JE: How do they get those tickets?

DC: Well, there are many theories on how they get tickets. The theories have gone all the way from the computerized ticketing company being in bed, so to speak, with the sellers, to the acts and management of the acts and sellers themselves. There are many times that the acts request X number of tickets to be sent to them to distribute on their own to fan clubs or business associates. So being it's their show, being under the direction of these people, the box office and the facility has no alternative but to send them those tickets.

Where they go from there has never really been discovered. But a lot of times, some tickets are returned to the box office. And that's why you'll see tickets opened up a couple of days ahead of a show, because they weren't used.

I do know a story that Concerts West told me when Frank Sinatra did a concert in New England that Frank actually took the tickets for the entire house and sold them, or his people did, to Frank's closest friends, his "underground associates." And when the tickets went on sale officially to the public, there were only like a hundred tickets available. This was way back in the early '70s.

The public went crazy, as they still do today, saying, "This is not fair! This is not fair!"

And supposedly, Frank's remark was, or his people's was, "Well, tell these folks just to go to hell. This is my show and I'm taking care of my friends first."

JE: [laughing] You had to be one of the most popular guys in the state of Oklahoma. There you were in your twenties, in your thirties, and you were the daddy of tickets.

DC: Well, I was glad that Southwestern Bell gave you the option of unlisted phone numbers, I will say that.

JE: You had to be hounded.

DC: I can remember going up to Grand Lake, where I spent many years from 1947 on, whenever a big sale would go on. And I had a great staff, which I've always been blessed with, to handle things. And being on the marine radio, finding out how the sale was going because I didn't want to be anywhere in Tulsa, Oklahoma, because I had a lot of friends that used to call and say, "Dick, this is So-and-so. How have you been doing?"

I know exactly what's coming, so I go, "Hey, it's good to hear from you, Joe," or whoever it was. So we'll get some small talk out of the way for about two or three minutes.

"I haven't seen you since college," high school, or since we went to this meeting.

"Well, it was good to talk with you, Joe."

"Oh, wait a minute, Dick, while I've got you, by the way," and then there would come the zinger. It was tough. It became a problem dodging the people.

JE: Carsons Attractions was family, it had to be one of the last in the country. Is it?

DC: It probably was the last. In fact, we were very close with Ringling Brothers over the years, a very large organization. And one of the fellows, one of the event coordinators that used to put together the Ringling act here, later left Kenton Feld and went with World Wrestling Federation. He called and I can remember, Mike said, "I cannot believe you're still in this business. You're the only one left doing this!" [laughs]

So we did last a long time and many, many years and a lot of memories.

JE: When did it end?

DC: Well, actually, what happened in 1966, forty-one years later, I had an opportunity to sell Carson Attractions to the firm that owns the Tulsa Oilers. We had talked about it for probably a year before. They were hoping, because of connections, to end up with the ticket organization from the new BOK Center.

It didn't work out. SMG, the management firm, decided to keep it in-house and opened their own box office. They kept the business going for another year or so. And, of course, sold their own ice hockey tickets. As well as continued to sell other tickets for concert events.

But it didn't work out. So at that particular point, Jeff Lund decided to go ahead and close.

JE: Timing is everything, isn't it?

DC: Well, it turned out to be, it turned out to be.

JE: Because you had no idea.

DC: A lot of years, no.

JE: You didn't sell it because you saw that coming?

DC: No. In fact, he had come to me because he had a very tight relationship with someone that was going to be able to pull some strings. But that didn't work out.

JE: And again, when did you sell it?

DC: Two thousand and six. Forty-one years later, after coming on board.

JE: Did you have any shows of Garth Brooks?

DC: No, we never did. Garth always did his own shows. He was kind of like Elvis used to be years and years ago, where he sold his own. Now, if he does go back on tour, he's almost obligated to use the in-house box office, wherever the arena is that he plays.

But what he used to do here in Tulsa was he'd go to Driller Stadium and actually put his own people there.

JE: You talked much earlier about Caruso.

DC: Um-hmm (affirmative)?

JE: There is the story of Caruso and his performance at the Brady. I see you smiling here.

DC: There was one story where Caruso was blaming the Brady Theater, or actually, Convention Hall in those days, for a draft that he caught and disrupted his voice and also caused his demise, I think. But I don't know how much credence there is to that story.

JE: Okay. But that would have been a show that your grandfather—

DC: That's correct, he presented all of that type of attractions. And those were the Elvis's and the Garth Brooks and the Eagles. I mean, that was the big thing. You didn't have pop music in those days. The only music was fine art culture, that was what was presented, and they brought it out from New York and the East Coast.

JE: What about Sinatra back there? Because he was singing in the '40s and '50s.

DC: Right, I don't recall a Sinatra engagement. I do know that they had people like Fred Waring and the Pennsylvanian Choir, Guy Lombardo went out on tour, Harry James. They would present some of those at Convention Hall in those days.

Chapter 07 – 9:25
Stock Car Racing

Dick Carson: Another thing that occurred back after my father died, my mother remarried after a couple of years to an individual by the name of Ervin Wolfe. Now Irvin was very close with Jack Zink, they had partnered a car at Indy before together. Irvin had a car on his own at Indianapolis and was very involved in racing.

Right after I had come back and my father had passed away, Ervin and Jack presented the Indianapolis 500 closed-circuit telecast to Tulsa. Right now we have it on television, but in those days, they didn't think they could sell it on television. So the only way you could see it, boxing matches too, was to do closed-circuit events in a large hall.

So Ervin and Jack Zink presented the Indianapolis 500 closed-circuit television. So my mother got to know Ervin Wolfe through that and Ervin had just lost his wife, and at a certain point, he nervously asked my mother if she would go out.

They did and eventually got married. And at that particular time, Dick Calvin, who had the stock car racing at the Tulsa Fairgrounds was giving the stock car racing program up and sold it to my mother and Ervin Wolfe.

So from 1967 until the early '70s, we were involved in promoting the stock car racing at the Fairgrounds.

When Ervin died in '69, of a sudden heart, he'd had heart trouble, my mother and I continued running the racing up into the mid to late '70s. So we had a lot going on in those particular days.

I was working Saturday nights at the races and didn't know anything about cars in those days, but I did know how to promote the event and do giveaways. And Dan Bell at KRMG was our announcer. He was the announcer for the Tulsa Speedway in those days. That's how I got to know Dan Bell at KRMG.

John Erling: You had fun, didn't you? I mean—

DC: I really did, John. You know, I think when I look back, I don't think I had as much fun as was imagined because it was all just business. It was all business, and I was always very involved with making sure that things went right and making my notes.

I can remember being at the office at seven and coming home at eight or nine at night for many, many years. It was all a business. So I think I missed out on a lot of the fun. If my personality was such that I would do it.

JE: Were there acts where you just lost money?

DC: Oh, sure. We eventually got into the phase of not promoting and doing promotions for other people, because of the large risk that was involved. Plus, in order to make money on events, you had to have the topnotch talent. In order to get the topnotch talent, you had

to go to the agencies, which firms like Concert West, were able to do, plunk down millions of dollars. And instead of buying an attraction for one city, which we used to do for Tulsa, Oklahoma, they would buy entire tours. They would plunk this money down, they would sign a contract for X number of cities. And then those firms would get in touch with us to help and assist them for a fee.

So we really got out of the risk business, and to be frank, we couldn't have afforded what these large firms did, anyway.

JE: Back in the '60s, where there stores in town that were sponsors or helped in any way that you could name?

DC: Sure. We used a lot of stores. We had two different areas involving commercial enterprises. Number one, on almost every event that we were involved in, we always involved a media sponsorship. Usually it was a radio station, sometimes television, but they weren't as attuned and didn't have the freedom on air that radio did. So we would always use a media sponsor and we also would use commercial sponsors like Pepsi Cola was very big when Phil Hughes was head of Pepsi here in town. We used to use Pepsi Cola to help sponsor. And we would use the media in a commercial enterprise, if they were buying advertising anyway, to tag their commercials or whatever to help push the event, and it saved us money out of our budget.

Then we also involved commercial enterprises here in town for sales of our tickets. Before we were computerized, we used to handle what they called "hard tickets," and we would take several stacks of tickets, scattered around the arena, to a particular outlet. We used Froug's here in town, it was a large department store chain. We used a grocery store chain at one point.

We usually outlasted the chain. They would either sell, go under, or whatever. We used a food chain called McCartney's Supermarket years ago.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

DC: My gosh, we have used, I'm sure, at least a half a dozen different commercial enterprises to sell our tickets over the years.

JE: Is it hard for you to believe what you did back then to know that now somebody can print off a ticket in their house?

DC: It's amazing, isn't it amazing? One of my very key employees is handling the box office for the BOK Center. And she was telling me the latest thing is that now you can actually put your barcode on your cell phone and they will scan the barcode on your screen as you enter the building. You go in without a ticket—but if you do want a ticket, when you get inside they can scan there. They have individuals and on their hip have a miniature printer. And if you would prefer to have a paper ticket, they can scan your phone, push a button, and out from this little machine on your hip, comes a piece of paper with your seat location on it.

JE: [laughing]

DC: That's how far it's gone.

JE: Little did your grandfather, your father, or even you know. That's great. [laughs] How much money do you think you paid acts to come? I don't know how far back you can remember, or even during your tenure as the head of Carson Attractions?

DC: Millions of dollars over the years.

JE: But do you know, like an Elvis Presley?

DC: Well, I know that when Elvis came in, I think the top price back in the '70s, I don't know if it was much above twenty dollars for a top price.

JE: For a ticket?

DC: Uh-huh (affirmative), for a ticket. Of course, if you had ten thousand, you know, if you had a couple of hundred thousand dollars for a performance and you pay your local expenses out, they walked away and they were very happy. A hundred thousand dollars for an act would have been wonderful for them to receive back in the '70s, even as big as Elvis Presley is.

JE: So he would walk away with a hundred thousand?

DC: Right, because, really, it was their own show. They used Concerts West to put together the details. Concerts West would get in touch with us locally. But, actually, the bulk of the funds would go to the act. And many acts did that. Many acts, rather than sell themselves for a fee, would actually promote themselves and retain people to take care of details.

JE: How big a staff did you have at one time?

DC: Oh, our W-2s would probably go into the twenties, twenty to twenty-five people, but all of them were, well, we had a permanent staff of about seven that were there day in and day out to help us.

Also in the late '70s, we opened offices in Oklahoma City. They had a ticket agency over there that handled all the shows. Had some trouble, there was some funds missing, or whatever, and Concerts West called us. Because they did a lot of shows in Oklahoma City at the Marriott then, and begged and pleaded for us to go over there and open up a ticket agency. This would have been like in 1976.

I really didn't know if we could handle it, but we went ahead and said we would. Because they had Neil Diamond coming in and they needed someone to sell their tickets. And that was a lot of money. Neil Diamond was one of the biggest acts that they promoted at the time. Especially since Elvis had passed away.

So we went over there and went into a partnership with Johnny Bench of the Cincinnati Reds catcher. He had a minor interest because they wanted to get their name out in the Oklahoma City area because he was getting ready to retire.

So we had Bench-Carson Attractions in Oklahoma City for about eight years until the bid for the ticketing went out and we lost the bid. So we came back to Tulsa and pulled our horns in.

JE: Was Johnny close to the business at all? Or just—

DC: Never, no.

JE: … used his name?

DC: Uh-uh (negative), name only. The manager of the Lloyd Noble Center was a good friend of Bench and his manager. He was one of the people along with Concerts West that called and said, "You really need to come over here, Dick. They've got a problem with Oklahoma City events. I handle my own at Lloyd Noble." But he said, "I'll tell you what, if you do come over, we want to involve Bench. He'd like to get his name out. He's got a bank here in Oklahoma."

JE: Yeah.

DC: "In a small town, Wilson, Oklahoma. And he's trying to get some business interest." And he said, "If you don't mind, if you can involve them."

So we did involve them. In fact, for the hyphen between Bench and Carson, I came up with a logo to use a small baseball in between.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

DC: So, no, he never was involved. We got together with him in a couple of faraway cities, just on a social event, but that was all.

Chapter 08 – 7:18
Mabee Center

John Erling: Students might be listening to this, they want to be in show biz promotion and you were a promoter. Any advice to them? Is that a cruel, tough world to be in these days? Even to get into it?

Dick Carson: Well, it's very difficult to get in with major acts because they're really monopolized by large firms. There's so much money. But that doesn't preclude them from going to a bigger city that has major acts and present major acts, to apply for a job.

One of the best fields that they could get in, I think, to be exposed to the business, now that you have building management firms such as SMG that manages the BOK Center in Tulsa, they have close to two hundred buildings that they manage. And they have to fully staff these buildings when they get contracts. Not only that, but they have hundreds of employees in each city, and they have attrition there.

So I think that maybe, as far as getting into the business, applying with someone like an SMG is certainly a way to be exposed to it. And they hire people all the way from box office to marketing people to event coordinators that help with details. And that would look very good on a resume, to say that you had been with a firm. Plus they may want to stay with the firm because they have a lot of good perks.

JE: Go back to your staff again, the names that worked for you back then?

DC: Well, John Walker, John and I were sigma kai fraternity brothers back at the University of Arkansas. When we had the Tulsa Speedway, I really felt the need to pull someone else into the business. John had just retired out of the air force. This was like in 1970. Not only did we have the Speedway, and we were very involved with the convention center, had many, many events each month. But Oral Roberts had just committed for Mabee Center and approached us to come into Mabee Center to help design the building and open up the box office and Mabee Center.

So we had that on our plate then. In fact, the gold seats below the walkway and the blue up above, I can remember coming up with that idea in the architects' meeting, because if you don't have a full house the blue kind of fades away. You don't really see it, so it doesn't look as bad. Now with the BOK Center, they have a curtain that drapes it off so you don't see an upper level.

Plus we went in and they provided us with lovely offices. And I actually moved my office from the Convention Center and had John Walker, that I hired, to be at the Convention Center outlet. And I went to Mabee Center for several years and had a lush, lavish office then. And we had a direct line on the phone where we just pick up the phone and it would immediately ring at the other one's desk.

So we were out there helping them get situated, helping with their box office, running the box office, helping contacts, bringing promoters in and doing that.

JE: It's interesting that Oral reached out to you.

DC: They came to us. Don Moyers, their attorney, contacted us and we went out there. In fact, got to know Evelyn and Oral while we were out there. John Walker had an office right next to mine.

In the mid '70s, when the Oklahoma City opportunity came along, we had Mabee Center offices. We had Convention Center offices. We had an office that was not permanent but whenever there were shows at the Fairground Pavilion, we would man that office for shows like during the Tulsa State Fair, we ran all those.

When Oklahoma City came along, I had to hire another person, I thought. So a friend of mine said, "Well, you should talk to my younger brother."

And I said, "I didn't know you had a brother."

He said, "Yeah, my brother, Jeff Lund, just graduated from OU and he's working at a local clothing store here. You ought to talk to him."

So I talked to Jeff Lund in the mid '70s, great personality and everything. During the interview I was making some notes. I said, "What's your birthday?"

And he said, "November 11, 1952."

And I said, "Well, mine's November 11, 1942." So I was exactly ten years. We celebrated our birthdays every year together, still do.

Jeff went on and worked for us in Oklahoma City and ran that office till the early '80s. And then his family had the Inner Urban restaurant chain. They wooed Jeff away from me and Jeff went into the restaurant business and came over here with the Inner Urban and Outer Urban at 71st and Yale, till the late '80s, when the Tulsa Oilers were going to start again, the Central Hockey League.

I had one of the owners of the league call me and want a reference on Jeff. And I said, "He'd be great, he'd be great."

So they hired Jeff as general manager and he, after that and several years, bought into the business and still to this day runs the Tulsa Ice Oilers.

JE: Let me bring you back to the Mabee Center. You sat in on many architectural meetings then?

DC: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: I think it's neat that Oral had a lot of respect for Carson Attractions.

DC: Well, it was an honor. I had some illness in the family and Oral and Evelyn both had heard about it. I think someone in my box office, the word in the grapevine, and all of a sudden, one day I was out there and they knocked on the door, because it was locked, not that they would have to knock, it's their building, but they came in and I was rather surprised. He would come down, oh, maybe a couple of times a month, just to stick his head in. He'd be visiting Ken Trickey next door, or whatever.

But he and Evelyn were there and came in and wanted to pray for the illness that existed in my family.

So that was very nice. They were really wonderful people.

JE: That's great. Unless we can think of anything else ...?

DC: Oh, I do remember a neat thing that happened [laugh], an occurrence. There was a Broadway show called *Hair*. *Hair* was well-known around the United States because they had a nude scene in *Hair*. *Hair* was booked in to Tulsa Municipal Theater, Convention Hall, Brady, whatever. This would have been in the '70s, early '70s. And not knowing what was going to happen, Roy Saunders, the director of public events that ran the Convention Center, John Walker, and myself went to Ft. Worth, Texas, to see the show. And it was nothing, really, dim lights, etc. They wanted Roy to stop the show because legally they couldn't in Tulsa, but we did want to know what the show was going to be like. And they wanted a lot of bad, not bad, but controversial publicity before the show came because that helped sell tickets.

And they got it. In fact, the Klu Klux Klan was out in front of the theater. A strange group to petition, but they were out in front of the theater condemning this. And in the middle of the show, the first performance, one of them was trying to crawl on the stage with a placard to protest *Hair* being in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

That was an interesting occasion to have the Klu Klux Klan involved with the Broadway show *Hair*.

JE: So they were bigoted against nudity?

DC: Or I think maybe because it was a "hippy-oriented show."

JE: Oh, okay.

Chapter 09 – 8:42
It Was Hard Work

John Erling: The talent of Oklahoma has been pretty good to you.

Dick Carson: Lot of nice memories, lot of friends.

JE: Carson, Carson Attractions was the, the, the business for tickets, wasn't it, in all those years?

DC: Very fortunate to survive it all.

JE: The family was lucky that you had a mind for business.

DC: Yeah, you know, I think that I acquired that being thrown into it so rapidly. It's such a different, strange business. And we used to have people from around the United States that were opening box offices in various arenas and stuff, come in and we'd give them one day tutelage on how things worked. But it's a very, very different type of business, the way that it works. As far as the money involved and how things are put together to present an attraction. It's very different. It's not a run-of-the-mill retail type business.

JE: Did you sense that acts coming to town would try to cheat you?

DC: No, no, but there are box offices around the country, or promoters, that would take advantage of the ignorance of acts. In that particular case, the individual had heard or read about this, so they wanted to know the ways that a box office could, if they were so inclined, cheat someone out of money.

So that's what we were really doing with the mother of either the Jackson Five or the Osmonds that came in, to show them the particulars of what you need to watch out for.

JE: Because it would be easy to cheat at that?

DC: Well, not necessarily easy but it certainly went on. You'd read in the newspaper about different cities having trouble.

JE: The *Tulsa World* do any stories?

DC: We have a scrapbook in years, in fact, in this CD you'll see there's a photo of a lot of articles that were written over the years. There was one, my mother and I were on the front page of the paper, where they did a ticket montage behind us, made a giant picture.

Another big picture was a colored picture that the newspaper ran when the capacity of the Tulsa Assembly Center, or Convention Center, was 8,992 seats. I remember that because we did so many shows there, 8992. But in order to break a record, we put extra seats in for the Andy Williams-Mancini show that KRMG presented and helped promote. And we got up to 9,005. So we set the Convention Center, or Assembly Center, record with it.

And there was a great photo of the top, Hopkins here in Tulsa took way up in the corner of the Assembly Center, filled to the brim with people. Great photo.

JE: Well, you're a young man sitting here today and looking back on iconic business in our town. So it must make you feel good to have been part of that.

DC: It was good to pull it all out and revisit it.

JE: Yeah. Very good.

DC: You know, when you start thinking about different things that are going on, when you pull them out, it's like, *By golly, you really did do this!* But it just never—

JE: You couldn't enjoy it at the time.

DC: No, because you were working, it was work. You had to put reports together and bills and advertising, affidavits and, you know, cut spots. It was just different. It's like anybody else. "Oh, it must be neat to be a banker."

"No, it's really work." Or whatever.

JE: Well, it was a job, that's what it was.

DC: That's right, it was a job.

JE: Right.

DC: I was fortunate in that I grew up in it was easier to learn. But I can remember going down and typing payroll checks, and that was before payroll services. And getting the book out and figuring the tax for each of the ticket sellers and doing this in hand, and typing checks up and pulling them out of the machine.

And people would come down, like Danny and Phil Sherman, and it was so funny. I wouldn't go to lunch. In those days, rather than jeans and a shirt, I wore a coat and a tie when I first started in the business. But I would sit there, actually, and carrying on conversations with these guys, friendly, not business-related, while I was typing away.

They used to say, "Carson, you got to stop now. We need to talk about this." It was just like there was so much to do and I did it kind of myself. My mother taught me all this, you know, "Here's what your dad used to do," and "Here's how he used to everyday put the deposits in this book." And I would hand put them into the book and keep track of what we had.

JE: So it was nothing for you to do ten-hour days?

DC: Oh, no. In fact, I think that probably had a lot to do with disrupting my first marriage. I'd come home and everybody was asleep. I'd get up and go in early.

And then later on, people used to kid me because I wasn't at work. [laughing] "Where are you?"

"Well, I was at work, years ago."

But I had great people that could handle some of these details. You know, it was great.

JE: I'm so glad that I did this because I didn't know all this about you and your background and all.

DC: I wish I knew more outside some of the things that were in our scrapbook.

JE: There was a story in the paper this morning about when ORU played Kansas for the Final Four in '74.

DC: We would have had them, yeah.

JE: Would you have sold the tickets to that?

DC: Um-hmm, um-hmm (affirmatives). Sure would have.

JE: Ted Owens and Ken Trickey are in the paper this morning about that game.

DC: Yeah. Trickey was great. We got along great with him. And then later, he got involved with the Fast Breakers and coaching them and it was great because he had his son and Ken were involved in that.

We ended up working with them after our ten-year absence.

JE: We talked earlier about charisma, I mean, you have charisma yourself. You do.

DC: You feel it?

JE: Well, your personality went along with this thing. A business mind and then you were easy to get along with and likes people. You had to have both going for you in order to make this happen. It came naturally to you, you can't even separate that now, and you think, *Well, that was natural for me*. But not everybody could do that.

DC: Well, maybe so.

JE: You've got to give yourself credit. [both laughing]

DC: Well, everything just kind of flowed, you know.

JE: Yeah.

DC: One day to the next, one year to the next. Still flowing.

JE: Your mother must have been proud of you though, the fact that you were able to step in and carry that business on.

DC: Well, I hope so. It would have been difficult, even though she worked with my dad, he'd handle the promotions, she'd handle the ticket sales. In those days, before the Convention Center was built they had stores in Vandevers, Vandevers Department Store.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

DC: She had an area in Vandevers where they would sit there with the hard tickets and sell tickets to attractions. And then the Convention Center, Assembly Center, was built and they had the invitation to go in there.

One of the stipulations my dad said, "We'd like to be able to sell advance tickets for elsewhere."

And they said, "We don't care."

JE: Vandevers was the location for that early on.

DC: Vandevers was the location for my parents.

JE: Yes.

DC: Early on. And—

JE: Was that the only one?

DC: … a very deep—well, actually, they had another place called Tulsa Book and Record that they also sold tickets out of. That was right around the corner.

Also my grandmother sold tickets at Jenkins Music Store. That was their first outlet. Jenkins Music, a very big firm in Kansas City and Tulsa. Their address was 515 South Main, because I can still remember seeing that years ago on brochures. They sold in Jenkins and then they moved to Vandevers and Tulsa Book and Record.

My parents were close with the Vandever family, not the older Vandever, but the children. So that was kind of a natural tie-in there.

And then when we got involved with the Speedway, we opened up the first branch office ever, at the Fairgrounds. And for the first time ever, you didn't have to go down to the Assembly Center to buy tickets, you could buy them out. We called it Carson Attractions East. It was still bad because you had to split tickets up.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

DC: You want to sit in this section, it was, you had to kind of always second-guess the public.

JE: It was hard work though, wasn't it?

DC: Oh, my gosh, and it was late night work, a lot of late nights.

JE: Yeah. And here's your mother sitting at a table selling tickets.

DC: Oh, yeah.

JE: You know? That's just plain hard work.

DC: And my grandmother and my mother used to talk about, they used to buy these rubber stamps and they would actually hand-stamp these tickets with Caruso and the date and they would write in seat locations and how much it was.

You'll see some tickets in here, the prices on some of those things were like a dollar. That was a lot of money in those days for people to spend out of their pocket.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

DC: In those days, they also added the tax on. Now its sales tax is always included. And for years, the Tulsa Philharmonic added their tax on. A $5-dollar ticket would be $5.25 or $5.23 or whatever.

Chapter 10 – 6:32
Want Our Money Back

John Erling: Was there any time after an act or something when the public said, "We want our money back?"

Dick Carson: Oh, my gosh, that was the biggest problem that you could envision outside of an act not showing up. Because if you did, that developed into everybody wanting their money back too.

But having something cancel, like we're talking about the closed-circuit television, they used to put a giant projector called an IMAX machine in front of a screen. And they would use phone lines from Southwestern Bell to transmit a picture. You would rent these machines and they were in a thousand arenas around the United States. But they were so temperamental.

And one time, right in the middle of the Indianapolis 500, click, no more picture.

And the first thing you want to do when you have a cancelation so that you're not stormed at the box office is the blinds are closed, the police are out front. "There's no one here but you'll be getting your money back." What we'd usually do would be put people out there with an envelope and let the ushers write people's name, address. They'd put the ticket stub in. We would have these.

I can remember on that Indianapolis 500, going home with my Smith Corona portable typewriter, putting it on the kitchen table with a stack of these names and addresses and how much was due, and started typing checks. I typed checks that night until midnight and started the next morning.

You had to get the money back. It was amazing. They would give their only proof of purchase to us there because they always knew they could get their money back, if we handled the sale.

And we turned a sale down. There was a show when the IPE was here, the International Petroleum Expedition was in Tulsa. And everybody wanted to make money because so many people were coming in. There was a group who wanted to bring in a variety show and it was going to have Jane Mansfield as a headliner and several others in this variety show at the Assembly Center.

The only thing that was kind of telltale of what was to be was when the promoter would say, "But as the money comes in, we're going to need some of it, because we need to pay some advertising and things like this." We never would let money out of the box office. Because if a show canceled, we had to give that money back, it wasn't our money. We were even out our fee. It all went back to the public.

So those people decided to sell their own tickets. Roy Saunders was pulling his hair out, little that he had, because we weren't handling the tickets. And what happened, the show flopped, no tickets were ever refunded.

We sat there in the lobby, Roy and I, Roy was shaking his head and he said, "From now on, Carson Attractions is selling every ticket here. The people never got their money back. It never sold enough. The stars didn't get paid so they wouldn't go on." And the money was gone. The IPE Spectacular.

JE: Did the people blame Carson Attractions?

DC: We had people two years later, come to our window and swear that they bought their ticket through us. And we said, "No you didn't."

"I know I did, I always buy tickets here, I know I did."

But they didn't. Yes, there was great confusion for a long time. But in most instances, we did handle the tickets. But in that particular one, it was very interesting to see people months and months later, come up and want a refund.

Actually, they sold them at a cigar store here in town, the Orpheum Cigar Store.

JE: For the IPE?

DC: They were not associated, they were just piggybacking on the event being here. It didn't have anything to do with the IPE. They just put this in their name, IPE Spectacular. They though they could make money because the IPE was here.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

DC: And it didn't sell any tickets, no one cared. They want to go out and party, they didn't want to sit in an arena, all these people that came in. So they sold tickets themselves so they could use those funds in whatever way they chose. And then when there weren't enough ticket sales, the acts couldn't be paid, and the show didn't go on, and all these people came streaming out of the Convention Center.

And I was in the lobby with Roy Saunders, the manager of the building, watching this, with our windows closed, because we didn't sell the tickets. And the people never got their money back, ever.

JE: But through all the years, the integrity of Carson Attractions always remained strong.

DC: I hope so.

JE: There wasn't any controversy. Because that does happen, has happened in cities.

DC: Oh, sure.

JE: And it didn't happen.

DC: That's why we went to Oklahoma City. We were convinced to go to Oklahoma City because that particular agency over there that was in business absconded with money. In fact, one time, we had over ten thousand dollars on a Neil Diamond show in Oklahoma City, not that particular Neil Diamond show that was our first show, but another one. And one of our outlets was broken into, the receipts were stolen—at least that's the story that was told.

We came up with the money out of our own pocket. Took years to pay back, just so the show could have their money.

In fact, Concerts West, a year later, I finally told them what happened. And they said, "You're kidding. You should have told us, we could have done something, maybe." Well, I never told them, it was our responsibility.

JE: What was the name of the guy who was before Larry Payton?

DC: Mike Crawley.

JE: Yes.

DC: We sold his tickets. He started selling his tickets the first year. And he was going to do a firm called Tulsa Tickets. That would have been the late '70s. And I'd known Mike before. There used to be a restaurant right next to the Louisiann at 18th and Boston called Smith's Restaurant. I used to go over there with my grandmother to eat all the time. Because she had a home about three or four doors to the south of Smith's and Louisiann.

And Mike Crawley used to play the organ there for organ music. But he wanted to use the money as it came in and started selling his own tickets. And it didn't work, they had real problems.

JE: And then Payton came right after that, didn't he?

DC: What happened, in 1978, after twenty years, we stopped Broadway Theater League, stopped doing it. Larry was with a student activity association out at TU and we had worked with Larry, letting him sell some tickets for us to the students, if it was apropos. And he'd always wanted to get in the business.

So a few years later, then he started Celebrity and started doing—

JE: Done a good job.

DC: Yeah, he has. Let's see those dogs.

JE: Yeah, let's do that.

Chapter 11 – 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*.