

Clayton Vaughn

As a widely respected news broadcaster, he was the face of KOTV news three separate times over nearly half a century.

Chapter 01 - 1:17

Introduction

Announcer: Clayton Vaughn was born in Kansas and raised in Cushing, Oklahoma where he began his broadcast career. He moved to Tulsa and KAKC radio in 1958 and joined KOTV in 1964. In 1969, he moved to Los Angeles to work for KABC but returned to KOTV in 1971, where he served as news director. In 1979, Clayton went to work for WNET-TV in New York City and the New Jersey Public Television System. He returned to KOTV in 1981.

During the course of Clayton Vaughn's career, he reported from nine national political conventions, traveled to Vietnam to report on area military servicemen and women, anchored from the Oklahoma City Federal Building bombing site, presided over scores of political debates, and interviewed people from all walks of life.

Clayton Vaughn's broadcast journalism career spanned nearly half a century. He retired from broadcasting in 1999 and became Executive Director of the Tulsa Historical Society until 2006.

Listen to Clayton talk about radion in the 50s, Tulsa's school desegregation, the 1968 Democratic Convention, and why birds flock on the oral history website VoicesofOklahoma.com.

Chapter 02 - 12:07

Family Picnics

John Erling: My name is John Erling, and today's date is December 14, 2010.

Clayton, state your full name, please.

Clayton Vaughn: Clayton Vaughn.

JE: No middle name?

CV: I had one once but I dropped it relatively early on and now both the federal government and my bank, or banks, accept the fact that I don't use a middle name.

JE: Can I ask why you dropped the middle name?

CV: It was just kind of in the way. I was named Clayton Rush Vaughn and the Rush was my mother's maiden name. It had no significance other than that. I never used it. I also never could write very well in cursive or printing or anything else. Do you know that they don't even teach cursive anymore in school? Because kids print and then they move on to typing on all of these machines that we use now for communication.

But at any rate, the R was kind of stuck in the way and my father used a looping C—his name was Clay—C-l-a-y, and then a big V-a-u-g-h-n for his signature. And my signature came to be just C. Vaughn, a big looping C and then a V and then you just kind of phlat [noise he made] off to the end. Because I never had to use penmanship except to take notes if I was on a story or writing something down. And my penmanship just continued to deteriorate over the years until right now, it's just totally illegible, even to me. After I take notes of something I'll have to look back and if I get 50 percent of what I've written down I consider myself really fortunate.

JE: So you dropped the Rush because?

CV: I couldn't write, essentially.

JE: Your—

CV: Well, it wasn't necessary.

JE: Your date of birth and your present age?

CV: One/twelve/thirty-five, January 12, 1935, seventy-five.

JE: Clayton, where were you born?

CV: Pittsburgh, Kansas.

JE: Let's talk about your mother and your father. Mother's name, maiden name, where she was born and where she grew up.

CV: Her name was Laura, her maiden name was Rush, she was born in 1910, in Kansas as well. Her father, they dug coal with big steam engine vehicles in Southeast Kansas, that's where we get all the strip pits, that's where they are, strip pits, these things had huge buckets on them and they just dug it right out of the top of the ground. And then they would stop after they got down to the point that they couldn't reach it with a bucket anymore. And that's why we've got these remarkable things called strip pits that are the size of football fields but they go down, straight down, in many cases.

JE: Yeah.

CV: Eighty, ninety feet. But at any rate, he operated one of those. Her father and mother lived in a small town called Mulberry, which was in Kansas, but it was also just on the border with Missouri. It was built up, really, to service the coal fields in Southeast Kansas. When those ran out, Mulberry sort of ran down. Mulberry still exists but its biggest industry is

its cemetery. There are only three or four hundred people who still live in the town and there are ten thousand or more people buried there. A really curious kind of situation because their Christmas, New Year's, Fourth of July, everything, is Memorial Day, when all of these people come back. And there's no place that they can go in Mulberry, I don't think the place has a gas station. And it certainly doesn't have anything like a restaurant or anything like that. So they have to do that someplace out ten or fifteen miles away.

But they come back and they stop by the little place that's the office for the cemetery and they make a donation of five dollars or ten or whatever, sometimes nothing, and see where their family is buried.

But she had a relatively undistinguished, so far as I know, upbringing but probably typical for that part of the country in the depths of the Depression.

My father was born in the same place, generally, but his father, my grandfather, moved to Southern California. My grandmother died at my dad's birth. So he had a stepmother and together his father and stepmother moved to Southern California. And Dad was sort of raised in Southern California and in Kansas with an aunt in the family.

My mother and dad got together and were married in around 1930, don't know for sure. But at any rate, it was the depth of the Depression and they were in Southeast Kansas. The only story that I can really remember from them at that time, well, actually there's more than that, there's two, one was though that conditions were such that they can remember gathering blackberries to sell so that they could have the money to buy shoes for my older brother and myself to go to school.

And they never said it as if that was a situation of martyrdom or that they suffered through great calamity like everyone else in the country was suffering through in the Depression. But this was the late '30s, by that time, or the mid-'30s, and the late '30s. And they would use that story as an indication of what everyone was suffering in the Great Depression.

And there came to be, as anybody who was as old as I am and even as relatively young as you are, John, realizes that people who lived through the Great Depression kept it with them for the rest of their lives. They lived differently; they thought about money differently; they thought about financial security differently, because of their experience during the Depression.

The same thing happens in wartime, I suspect, I don't think you can go into a way, particularly the one like World War II without being fashioned somewhat by that. The culture was fashioned somewhat by that, the United States culture was certainly fashioned by that. So you had these two remarkable events that occurred, at least in our lifetime or our parents' lifetime, which was the Great Depression and then World War II.

There aren't many things like that that have happened in my lifetime, at least, that go up to that kind of level that actually changes the country and everyone in it.

The other story that I remember from my childhood that I think is kind of unusual and may give you a picture of what it was like to grow up in those parts in those days, was that on Sundays, the family, grandparents, my mother's sister and brother and all the cousins and everything else, it'd be ten or fifteen people probably by the time your brought assorted spouses and that sort of thing, would go on picnics. And the menu always included cold fried chicken, bread and butter sandwiches, two or three other things that I don't really recall, and fruit pies in metal pans. They would go out to a, I don't know, to a river or someplace, someplace other than their home. And they would put blankets down and have a picnic, assuming that the weather was good.

After the picnic, my father used to tell the story of taking the pie pans, the metal pie pans, turning them over, and tossing them back and forth through the air. He said it was the first missed opportunity of his life, because Wham-o came along and with the Frisbee, of course, made a boatload of money. While my father was still selling tires for Montgomery Ward stores.

JE: Was that his profession for much of his life?

CV: He was a salesman. He was a terrible businessman but he was a good salesman. He started with Montgomery Wards and we moved around to two or three places. Montgomery Ward, at that time, I don't know what they did at the corporate level, but at the retail level they drew all their store executives from people who worked already in the store. And they moved them around in terms of location rather than move them up in the particular store in which they might have been hired.

My dad was hired as a tire salesman, I think, in Jefferson City, Missouri, or something, he says. But he was moved three or four times as he advanced through the hierarchy. He became a department manager and then a something or other, I don't know, but eventually he reached the level of store manager. His first store was in Cushing, which is where I would eventually grow up.

When you are a store manager and then you want to get promoted, you have to move to a bigger store, which means you have to move to another town. And they liked Cushing so much that they decided to stay. So Dad set up an appliance store. It had a small record shop right next door to it, right off Cushing's Main Street. I grew up at that time and that's what Mother and Dad were doing.

I can remember crawling around on roofs when I was a teenager and helping Dad's, not assistant, you hire somebody when you're selling refrigerators and television sets and stuff to go out and deliver them—

JE: Yeah.

CV: . . . and take care of them and put the antennas on the roofs. And I got caught up in being the assistance, assistant, so I know how to put a television antenna on a roof, and I know how to uncrate a refrigerator. Don't know if they're done the same way now.

JE: So was that Vaughn Appliance Store?

CV: Actually it was, Vaughn's Appliance. He had the Frigidaire and the RCA franchises, so he sold a complete line of kitchen stuff. Then he also sold radio and TVs, so long as they were RCAs. Mother ran the little record shop that was right next door.

JE: That was your family's record shop?

CV: Yes.

JE: Brothers or sisters?

CV: Older by four years, his name was Gleed, died four or five years ago. Grew up in Cushing, went to the University of Oklahoma, became a commissioned officer and a pilot in the Air Force and that's where he spent his career.

We were four years separated so we were never really in school at the same time. And because of his career, as soon as he joined the Air Force, which was as soon as he was out of school, he went someplace else. And so he served all over the world. I never did know him very much. And when I got to the point where I realized that it's okay if you really don't know or even don't like, although this wasn't particularly the case with my brother and I, it's okay to do that with a family member. It doesn't diminish the love that you have for your mother, father, aunt, uncle, cousin, brother, sister, whatever, but it's okay not to like them. Or it's okay just to establish whatever kind of relationship you want. And not feel particularly guilty because you don't really enjoy being around, in their home, or presence, or seeing them for more than holiday dinners and so forth. This excludes, of course, the, you know, Uncle John's who always show up drunk at Thanksgiving and say embarrassing things, and so you can dislike that sort of person real easily.

But it's the others who are just kind tangential to your life, but because you have gone in different directions. You know a lot of other people in your current circle of acquaintances and friends. And you know them and like them a lot better than you do your own relatives. It took me a long time to get over some guilt feelings about that, eventually, I did.

Chapter 03 - 8:37

Stage Manager

John Erling: The first school you attended, what's your memory of that? What was the name of it?

Clayton Vaughn: I don't have much memory. It was a grade school in Cushing. My mother kept for years, and I think I still have it, a little report card, a little small five by seven or something, yellow cardboard, which I signed as Clayton Roy Rogers Vaughn. That's

when I was still writing and shortened my signature. And I have no recollection at all of the school aside from the fact that a picture remains from some grade, probably the first grade, and it had all of the school or the first grade or something, thirty or forty kids standing out in front dressed in 1940-something dress in Cushing, Oklahoma, which had a lot of bib overalls and that kind of thing. Because Cushing was not really what you'd call an uptown town at that point.

JE: You would have been about six years old in 1941, December 7th, Pearl Harbor.

CV: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: Are you too young, do you have any memory of the announcement?

CV: No, no, I don't remember the announcement at all. All I remember of that whole period of time is ration cards, ration stickers in the windows of automobiles, and milk that was delivered to your home with the cream on top. I've always suffered from a bad memory, I've always suffered from a lot of things, but among the terrible things that I have is a bad memory. I can't remember names, I can't remember dates. Sometimes I'm just totally lost, in terms of trying to bring back something that happened in my life at that point. I know a lot of stories, but in terms of being able to recreate a day, for example, in your mind, I'm lost, I just can't do that.

JE: Do you remember listening to old-time radio programs?

CV: No, as far as I know we didn't, so far as I recall, we didn't. Even though we were the place in town where you bought radios, if you want to do that, but television came in in deep '50s, or something and I remember that we had the first television set in town. Before we had one in the house, Dad actually put one in the window of the store. People would walk by and they could see the test signal, you know, with the Indian head just sitting there. And then later on, there became a little picture of a sailboat. And then after that, the sailboat actually moved, and that was a pretty big deal, you know, picture's flying through the air. I don't think God ever intended that and there were several of us who learned that lesson in later life.

JE: The first television image of programming nature, programs, or anything that strikes a bell right now that—

CV: No. I've listened to a lot of old recreated stuff—

JE: Yeah.

CV: . . . since, just as a matter of curiosity, you know, the old *Jack Benny Shows* or a few things like that. I think because of the record store I've always loved big band/swing music, although I have a, I have a lot of deficits in my cultural personality. I don't know anything about country music; I don't know anything about classical music; I'm not a huge fan of rock and roll, although I have been to three Rolling Stones concerts, I think only because my wife, Nancy, to whom I've been married to for almost forty years now, thought for a

time, and may still think, that she had a chance with Mick Jagger. So she would drag me, she still drags me to Rolling Stones concerts.

There's a lot of other things I don't know about. Don't know anything about painting, don't know anything about dance. I'm incredibly ill-read in terms of the classics, we didn't pay much attention to the classics in Cushing High School and by the time I got to college I was so interested in other things that that never happened anyway.

JE: But there was no recollection of if your folks had the record store of Frank Sinatra and Tommy Dorsey and those people?

CV: Not playing live on the radio, I mean, I knew what their records were and I know the words—

JE: Okay.

CV: . . . to all those songs. I drive my wife nuts because you have CDs in your car now, you know. So I know "Fly Me to the Moon," and I'll sing along with it and I know all the words. I know all the words to all those things, it's really crazy. I couldn't recite them right now but you put the record on and I can tell you whether it's the original person who did that or whether it's a cover, and I can do all the words.

JE: So did that come about because of the music store or you listening to the radio?

CV: I think it was just totally random, frankly. I don't understand how the mind works at all, but when you talk about remembering song lyrics, how do people do that? I just have no idea. And I'm one of the people who do it and I'm just, I'm just bum-fuzzled. That's in my bum-fuzzled list, John.

JE: So you leave elementary, you're into junior high school.

CV: Yeah, I don't remember anything about that.

JE: How about high school?

CV: High school, I remember some things about that. I was really active in the speech program, which is what eventually got me into radio, because the same teacher taught drama, who taught speech. I became a good student of hers and we developed a wonderful student-teacher relationship and I became what's called the stage manager, at that time.

So any school event that required use of the stage, I ran that, which meant that I had a permanent pass from classes that I could exercise at my discretion, to go set up the stage for an assembly that was going to be done, or some people who were going to do, you know, whatever on the stage. It allowed me a lot of freedom. I don't think I abused it at all but the people stopped asking me really early on what I was doing walking down the hallway in the middle of a class or something. Because I'd just get up and leave and the teachers all knew it.

And I was the senior class president and I played a little sports, not much and not very well, track, basketball. Actually, I lettered in basketball, just kind of amazing. Football coach wanted me to go out for football and I never could quite understand that.

JE: [laughs and laughs all through next section]

CV: He said that he wanted me to because he needed somebody who could remember the plays and I thought that was just too dangerous. Besides that, you know, you play football in high school on Friday nights in Oklahoma, and you do that through the wintertime and it's cold during the wintertime. And I've never liked to be cold. I have a really low tolerance for cold. Actually, I have a doctor's permit for that because I have a thyroid imbalance that if left unchecked makes your heart beat at an abnormally high rate, which is not particularly good for you.

When I was forty, fifty, someplace in there, I went to the doctor about this racing that my heart would do occasionally and I was diagnosed with this, it's either Graves' Disease or Hashimoto's, one of them hyper and the other one is hypo, but they both produce the same thing, this heartbeat that's very fast sometimes.

The people who have Graves' Disease, I think they have to take a radioactive iodine dose or something and kill the thyroid. And people who have Hashimoto's, which is what I have, don't kill the thyroid but you still have to take the same kind of pill, which the brand name is Synthroid. And you have to take one a day for the rest of your life. And it's a small pill. If you take the pill, you never have any problem but you still have the disease all your life. And one of the side effects to those two diseases, well, at least to Hashimoto's, which is what I have, the pill controls the heart but it will not control the side effects. And one of the side effects is a low tolerance to cold.

And so I discovered, when I was middle-aged, that I really wasn't such a sissy wimp who couldn't stand to be out in short sleeves if the temperature was under eighty degrees. So I started feeling a lot better about the manly part of myself. So I still have that. I'm wearing fleeced jeans right now although I knew I was going to be inside for this interview, and I assume relatively comfortable, but I don't feel overly warm.

JE: Should we set the heat up?

CV: No, doesn't matter, I'm fine.

JE: Let's take you back to high school. You were in charge of setting up the stage but there must have been a point where maybe you were a performer. Well, you said you were in speech—

CV: Yeah, and I did a couple of plays, that sort of thing.

JE: . . . so you were a performer.

CV: Well, several plays, actually.

JE: So, so—

Chapter 04 - 9:46**KWHP Cushing**

John Erling: Where did this radio thing start? Was that there in high school?

Clayton Vaughn: A guy named William Howard Payne came into town and I don't know why to Cushing. I think he'd been raised in Oklahoma, but by that time, he was a lawyer in Washington, who primarily practiced on Indian law, Native American law. He put together the money and somehow got the FCC to give him a license for a thousand-watt day-timer. For those who hear this and don't know what you know, John, day-timers, you sign on at six o'clock in the morning and then you sign off at dark. And it's a really crazy kind of system but do they still even have those things? I don't really know, it doesn't matter, but at any rate, they did then. This was back in the early '50s.

So this guy comes into town, he builds this radio station. He gets all the staff put together but they need kind of an odd-job guy, and they don't want to pay much, so they think they'll get a high school kid to do it. So he calls the principal of the high school and said, "You got anybody like that?"

And he said, "I don't know, I'll let you talk to our speech teacher."

And our speech teacher, bless her heart, came to me and said, "There's this radio station gig that I think you could do."

So I went out there and that was my initiation into broadcasting.

JE: In—

CV: Nineteen fifty-three, actually.

JE: And you'd had no thoughts of radio prior to that time when she came to you?

CV: No, um-um (negative), totally off the radar. I was an appliance store's assistant, at that point.

JE: Any thoughts about what you might have been when you grew up, at that point?

CV: No, I had a really terrible scholastic record at the University of Oklahoma. Went three years, I think, may have been two and a half, and then laid out a half and then another half, but I never graduated. Uh, I flunked French 1 twice and stuff like that. I had a good time though that may have been part of the problem. But I changed my major, like, six times. I started out in electrical engineering, I think, and then I went into mathematics because I was pretty good in math. Then I went into business, I think.

OU, I think, at the time, had a broadcasting school or journalism school, something like that. And I may have actually ended up there, but I never got a degree so it really didn't matter.

JE: But while you were changing your majors you apparently hadn't decided to select radio as a career.

CV: Well, I forgot to tell you, and it makes more sense, that 1953 was my last year of high school. So I had started in radio at that point. And OU was not that far away. Whenever I would come home I would work at the radio station, even if it were only on weekends and they needed somebody to do that. And I would certainly do it through the summers.

After 1953, I never had a job that was not in broadcasting. I may have done an odd thing to try to pick up some money one time. I think this was in Cushing, and I remember crawling up on top of railroad tankers and sealing them off or something in the middle of the night and I got paid for doing that. But it was just a part-time job.

I can speak freely now because my mother and father have died and it really wouldn't be of interest to anybody else, but they needed as much financial support, at that time, because their business was going through a long downhill slide that eventually led to failure. So I helped out a little there.

JE: The call letters of that station that you were working?

CV: KWHP, and the WHP was for William Howard Payne, the guy who started it. It's now known as KUSH, which makes a lot more sense if it's in Cushing.

JE: You did about five years there at that radio station.

CV: Off and on, yeah.

JE: Till?

CV: 'Fifty-eight.

JE: Maybe we can do a little background to the '50s, what was happening. Did you recall news of the Korean War and maybe soldiers from your area serving in it?

CV: As far as I know, I never knew anybody or came in contact with anybody who was in Korea. I'm sure I must have known about it because I did newscasts at KWHP, or whatever it was at that time. But the newscasts were simply rip and read stuff, right off of the wire. Along with whatever I could gather, because despite the fact that the station was supposed to be fully staffed, what interested me was what news was going on around town. And so I sort of set up myself and it was encouraged by the management to cover the news in Cushing, which I did from a telephone from our studios, which were two and a half miles outside of town. Hardly ever went out on a story because I couldn't, I mean, I was tied to the station, because I was the announcer and the newscaster.

I started covering local news when I was at KWHP and it was the fashion, at that time, if you'll remember the *Associated Press* and everybody was essentially, and you had a story of some interest beyond your own local community, to pick up the phone and give it to the *AP*.

And I did that and the *AP*, when they came back on their state wire would say, "Story supplied by KWHP," or "Supplied by KRMG," or KVOO, or whatever, in that kind of case. Ninety percent of the stories were copies, carbons that were coming out of newspapers,

primarily the *Daily Oklahoman* and the *Tulsa World*. Because the *Associated Press* actually had offices within their newsrooms. I mean, they were *Associated Press* people sitting there getting carbons of every story that ran in the world and *Oklahoman*. And that's the way that that was set up.

But at any rate, those little supplied bylines were out there and there was also an association of *Associated Press* stations, I think. They would give awards to people who participated more because they wanted participation. That's how the system worked. So I got awards and I think I was president of the association once and so forth.

But at any rate, it came to the attention of Dick Schmitz, who was, at that time, with KAKC in Tulsa. He was one of what we called the second generation KAKC people. And KAKC had taken over the Tulsa market with a top-forty format.

One other thing about my high school days, I was also senior class president. And there was an impeachment move to get me out of office because I, number one, refused to buy a high school ring, which I thought were just junk. And number two, I would not participate in the annual junior-senior fight, which was a, sort of a right of spring in which two or three carloads of boys, juniors and seniors, would go out and they would find a country road where there was no traffic, stop the cars, and get out in the middle of the road, and a junior would fight a senior, fist fight, bare knuckle, go for the face, hit him in the nose kind of fist fight. And it would normally last long enough until it drew blood someplace. And then everybody would say, "Okay, that's enough, now we can go back home." So they went home. And I refused to participate in both of those.

But there was also an activity there, which I find really charming in retrospect, in kind of a macabre way, in which at night a carload of boys would go out on those country roads again and one of them, actually, would ride on the fender of the car, going very slowly, lights were on, of course. And you would occasionally scare up a rabbit or a cat. Then you'd take the shotgun that the guy out on the fender was taking and you'd take a shot at whatever it was.

And they always kept asking me if I would go along and, "Why don't you do this, Vaughn? You're not much of a man if you don't go out and if you don't go hunting with us." And I'd never been hunting and I really wasn't much of a fisherman in any way, not even that, but I was certainly not a hunter. Didn't have anything to do with guns and that sort of thing. So they finally talked me into it.

And when it came my turn, I was on the right front fender, and something came up in the road, I've forgotten what it was, could have been a turtle, for all I know. But at any rate, I fired one shot and I blew the hood ornament off a 1947 Plymouth, which was the car in which I was riding. Hood ornament at that time for Plymouths were about six inches long and they had three little ships in them. Sailing ships. It was kind of an

interesting hood ornament, and it, pow, [sound he made] just went away with my first and only shot. So that's the only thing I've ever hunted for is hood ornaments off of old Plymouths.

JE: In the radio station, were you never performing as a disc jockey? Was it always news? Did you do both or—

CV: No, no, I did have to do a disc jockey thing ever once in a while and it was terrible. It was just god-awful. The only thing I remember about it is that I had to use the name Hillbilly Willy one time. Now how's that?

JE: [laughing] Why that name?

CV: I don't know. Nobody else was using that name.

JE: You played—

CV: Or maybe they were and they just ran out of people to use it. And I don't remember what I did. It sounds like that was country and western music, but I certainly didn't know anything about that.

JE: So then it was your news work through basically the five years until 1958.

Chapter 05 - 9:50

The New KAKC

John Erling: You've already jumped ahead and you talked about Dick Schmitz. How did you come to the attention of KAKC?

Clayton Vaughn: Through that business about supplying stories to the *Associated Press*.

JE: They saw that there was this—

CV: Yeah, there was somebody over in Cushing who is doing a good job getting local news. And you could barely hear our signal in Tulsa, but Dick told me later that he had found it and he had listened to me two or three times.

He called me over and said, "You want to move to Tulsa?"

And I said, "Sure."

JE: As easy and simple as that?

CV: Yeah, pretty much. Three hundred and fifty dollars a week and the use of a car. It was a station wagon that Long's Carpet painted on the side.

JE: And that was—

CV: Did I say \$350 a week? It was \$350 a month!

JE: KAKC was a rock and roll station.

CV: Yeah, top-forty format. A guy named Gordon McClendon changed radio forever in Dallas when he put that format on the air at a station. But McClendon duplicated it in

Dallas and Houston and two or three other stations, generally across the country. And this happens in radio a lot, as you know, if it works in Minneapolis, there's no reason it shouldn't work in St. Louis and so forth. So every market had a top-forty station and most of those were incredibly successful, including KAKC. Totally dominated the market for a long time.

JE: So we had names like Sam Cooke and Gene Vincent and Chuck Berry and Fats Domino and—

CV: Yeah, except those are rock and roll people, I didn't know any of them.

JE: But that's what your station was probably playing.

CV: Oh, yeah, sure, but I was doing the news. I didn't listen to any of that stuff.

JE: So, was, in about the mid-'50s, we had a young man by the name of Elvis Presley who came along.

CV: I think "Blue Suede Shoes" and that Presley thing started in, like, '53, '58, something like that. I remember him being very big when I was, at least in college, which would have been '53 to '56. Something like that. I mean, that's what they were playing at OU, you know, in the dormitories and in the bars that we're not supposed to go into, that sort of thing.

JE: And would have been playing as you came to KAKC.

CV: Sure.

JE: But music was not your thing so you really didn't pay much attention to that stuff.

CV: I didn't pay any attention to it at all. I was supposed to do a five-minute newscast, five minutes before the hour, I think, and then do a little sports and a little weather. And when I wasn't available, the disc jockeys read the news. And the only time that I ever had to go on was if they absolutely desperately needed somebody to fill a disc jockey slot. I mean, typically it'd be on Saturday night or something and everybody would be sick or gone or on vacation or something. All of the disc jockeys, the big seven, or whatever they were called, had these little customized theme songs. "Ah, it's early in the morning and here you are on KAKC and it's time for the *Dick Schmitz Show*."

And then there'd be a little musical bridge in which a disc jockey would come in and say, "Hi, glad to have you with us. Stay with us for the show. We're here until nine o'clock with you." And then the chorus would come back in and say, "It's time for the *Dick Schmitz Show*."

So those things were cut out for everybody but they didn't do one for me. They just couldn't see expending the money for that. But I still had to open with something on the rare occasions when I would have to do that. So I played the "Mickey Mouse Song." It really made the station manager very angry. [laughs] He talked to Dick, who was the program manager, and who was the person responsible for assigning the disc jockeys. He said, "Try to keep Vaughn off as much as you possibly can."

And he did, pretty much.

JE: And you were in agreement with that, I'm sure.

CV: Oh, absolutely.

JE: With KAKC dominating, it was a source of news, and yet, you had KRMG?

CV: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: KVOO?

CV: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: They were also doing news.

CV: Yeah, not like we were doing it.

JE: Okay, how was it you were doing it?

CV: It was hit 'em and get 'em. And everything first and everything fast. Blazing speed, in terms of the reads. Went out and covered it from the scene. You see smoke anywhere in Tulsa, you turn on KAKC, there it is, because they've got somebody there. We had people who would call us day and night with news stories. We actually staffed, as well as you could at that point, city commission, at that point, meetings. You knew who the mayor was. You did everything you could for the schools, that kind of thing. So you were constantly out in the community and doing those things.

And it was also good for the DJs to be involved in that sort of thing. One of them, Harry Wilson, got a complimentary set of fire department gear, including hat and the big galoshes, or whatever you call those things, and the rubber suits, and all that kind of thing. And when they would be a fire, Harry would be there. And he had his stuff in his car. So he'd put on his gear, and jump out and help the firemen.

JE: And he was a disc jockey?

CV: Yeah.

JE: But he then served as a news person. And so that happened every once in a while?

CV: Oh, yeah, yeah, it happened every once in a while. And the disc jockeys would have to read—sometimes if I didn't want to do the sports, they would do the sports. And I never had any interest in sports so it was fine.

Scooter Seagraves, a guy who's still alive and works over in Arkansas now, well, he calls himself Scott. His real name was George Basil Seagraves III. Scooter would always, whenever he would do the sports, he'd say, "Okay, here are some baseball scores, Yankees three, the Mets four. The winning pitcher was unpronounceable name." [both laugh] And he would just fleew [noise he made], float right through it. I mean, if he came on to Carl Yastrzemski, or somebody, you know, he couldn't get it, he would just substitute "unpronounceable name." And people seemed to enjoy it, it was okay. We didn't take ourselves that seriously.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative). This approach to news, did that come with the format of rock and roll? Or was that a local news person that said, "We're going to go out and get it and get it now and we're going to be on the scene immediately"?

CV: It was part of the package that McClendon put together. You ran the news at a certain time. As I recall, it was five minutes before the hour, but you also did a minute down at the bottom of the hour someplace. And then you did weather a couple of places. And sports once, I think. But never for more than a minute, other than that five-minute thing.

Of course, something happening, you break in, you take as long as you want. I don't care if it was commercials or music or whatever, so that you would adopt this character of always being there and always being first. And if it happens, we're going to cover it better, faster than anybody else. Because this is the new KAKC.

JE: So that must have been in the minds of some of the, say, older folk, at the time. Perhaps having to put up with this rock and roll music because we want to know what the latest in news is and we know it's going to happen?

CV: It was a remarkable phenomenon. We were playing music that was really geared toward teenagers. Early teenagers, like typical, would be thirteen-year-old girls. That's who it was designed for. But, all of a sudden, and I have no idea why, people, regular people, middle-age people, started listening to it. And by listening to the music they would listen to the news that way. The news package that went along with it, the shares were 75 or 80 percent, something like that. No one could understand it.

And then everybody else had to adjust in town, and you've got to remember too that there weren't nearly that many stations at that point. I think there were four or five, maybe. Nobody on FM except KWGS, but nobody had FM sets so that really didn't matter.

So it was kind of a cultural thing. Not a big deal, but it was an identifiable thing that happened. And we just took over the city.

JE: Coupled with that, what I suppose, would be the fact that stations like KRMG were still taking network programming.

CV: Oh, yeah.

JE: So they were listening to Arthur Godfrey maybe and some of those things. And they weren't as equipped. You guys were running a live show and they weren't always live.

CV: Oh, yeah, yeah. There was a night and day difference.

JE: It fell right into what you were doing, right.

CV: In what, in what it looked like. There were some live shows on KRMG and on other stations. I still remember Johnny, who did the nighttime thing at KRMG.

JE: Johnny Martin.

CV: Johnny Martin did that for a hundred years, it seems like,

JE: Right.

CV: He said, "It's Friday night, case night," as I recall.

JE: Case night in the city.

CV: Yeah. But it wasn't any place close, wasn't any place close. There was just a whole new attitude. I kept getting handouts from the Department of Defense, saying what surplus

military equipment was available for sale. So I went in and talked to Dick, and said, “Look, let’s write some spots for this, public service spots. Because the Department of Defense needs our help.”

So we came on and we would do a really fast hard thirty-second, two-voice spot for a destroyer.

JE: [laughing]

CV: “Time for your own destroyer! Get ’em while they last. The Department of Defense, call Norfolk, Virginia.” You know, just stuff like that, just crazy stuff like that.

JE: Did you actually give a contact number? So did you ever have a feedback on any of that?

CV: Oh, no, course not. You know, I couldn’t find anybody who wanted to buy a battleship or something.

Chapter 06 - 8:17

Tulsa Desegregation

John Erling: Do you remember stories that you would have covered that were big? James Maxwell was the mayor from ’58 to ’66.

Clayton Vaughn: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: Were there any stories that you had reason to interview him or been around him?

CV: I knew Jim reasonably well. I knew him in the sense that I didn’t have any social contact with him but I knew him as the sense of the relationship that you occasionally develop, and I’m sure you did the same thing over your career, with people who are in public positions somehow and are used as sources and you talk to them so much that you build up an element of trust that runs both ways. So I knew Jim that way.

I knew Charlie Norman that way, who was a longtime city attorney and ended up writing all of the city’s zoning laws. Which is why Charlie turned into a class A zoning attorney, until he went over to the dark side and started working for developers instead of the other side. Charlie’s gone now but he was one of the best there is.

Charlie also hired the first black city attorney. But that was during the time that integration was starting to come into the schools. There was a huge difficulty in Tulsa about school integration, racial integration. Led to a change in the whole culture of the community because it changed the education system. A lot of us were still so stupid that we didn’t realize that education was the foundation of everything that you deal with in a community or in a country, as a family or as your own development. That’s the way to solve racism, that’s the way to solve poverty, that’s the way to solve the inequality in the

country of opportunity is to make a good educational base. The economy depends upon it, the culture depends upon it, your very nature depends upon it.

But at any rate, that was one of the big stories that was going on at the same time.

JE: So the '60s, the early '60s, leading up to '64 and the Civil Rights Act, were there racial stories or unrest that you would have covered at all?

CV: Oh, yeah, yeah, and we did.

JE: What? Like...

CV: People always used to say, "Why can't we cover this from a black perspective?" "Why can't we cover this from the African American perspective?" They weren't African Americans at that time, they were black.

And I'd say, "Well, part of the problem is that if you look under the *Yellow Pages* under B, there are no Blacks listed under B, Black Leaders. So you kind of had to make your own sources. And that was tough when the community was trying to sort itself out. But it was during the time of Don Ross and B. J. McIntyre and people like that, the young Turks, probably a terrible term to use for them. And you'd have people like Ben Hill, who was the long-time minister of the AME. Tulsa's black community tended to break down along two leadership lines. One was involved almost entirely with churches and led by ministers and still is, for that matter, I mean, to this day.

The other was led by these younger people who were suggesting that there was something going on in the country and it ought to be going on here in Tulsa as well. We ought to be paying attention to this kind of thing.

There were some other immunity rating influences that would come into it; the whole business about school busing, for example, was a huge issue across the country. It ended up being a big issue here. Got into the federal courts, that's how we got the School Magnet System, because that was a tradeoff, essentially, by a federal court ruling. I mean, that's why we got Booker T. Washington and Carver and all of that kind of stuff.

And then there was another element in the white community, which was led by a group of ministers again. These were not black ministers, these were white ministers, who felt that it was part of the moral obligation that they had, the community had, to try to desegregate the community. Not really sure that integrate is the right word but at least to desegregate the community. And this group of ministers who included John Wolf, who is still alive, I'm happy to say, from All Souls, Warren Hultgren from First Baptist, Wiseman from, what was he, First Pres?

JE: Presbyterian.

CV: Yeah. Uh, Clarence Knippa, who it would be really remiss of me if I didn't mention Knippa, he's in his nineties now, still active, from the Lutheran church. They started meeting, they met every week for lunch. They essentially became the conscience of the community.

And if you were plugged into them, it was a lot easier to figure out what was important and what wasn't. And how we were doing.

And they tended to take different approaches to it. Some would be very reasoned with their congregations. John Wolf thundered from the pulpit about getting Charles Mason to desegregate the schools. Said Mason was the worst superintendent that we'd ever had. Eventually got Mason fired, I think, and the schools went on to desegregate after that. After he left. But he would go to school boards and rail against the system as it was and the system as it could be and the system as it should be.

And we need people like that. Every community needs people like that. And Tulsa was really fortunate, I think, at the time to have this group of men, I'm not trying to be sexist, but they were all men at that time, who found in a unified and coordinated front that they could make more progress.

So here you have this thing happening, and there were many, many people of good heart and good mind, and many times, of great resources, who were in white Tulsa, who realized as well that we needed to make some changes.

Then you have the young Turks over here on the north side and then you have the ministers on the north side and everybody's taking a different approach and the whole thing becomes a melting pot, which is what it should be. Because that's the way a community really ought to make its decisions.

And Tulsa was very fortunate that we had political leaders like Bob Lafortune during that period of time. And Bob was a Republican, he was family-oil wealthy, I mean, he didn't need any kind of power, position, anything else in order to make his credentials in the community. But he served as mayor and he was more than just a mayor, he was a community leader. And he hooked himself up with the various neighborhood and ethnic groups.

The Hispanics were pretty much a dot on the map and there was no Asian community to speak of at that time, so it really was a black/white problem.

JE: But even before him it was Jim Hewgley—

CV: Yeah.

JE: In '66 to '70. Was he a leader in this area?

CV: Hewgley was more of a businessman, at least in my view. And I've known Jim a long time, I mean, since before he took office. Remarkable man. He was, I think, the first Republican mayor. He was famous for saying, "Well, we finally got the City Hall back where it belongs at Southern Hills," as I recall. He would chew those cigars of his that were never lit and he'd have a bunch down at the Round Table at the Summit Club, but his heart was always in the right place.

And he did a lot of things that were very, very good for this community, particularly in terms of its economic development. And you may recall that that was sort of at the start

of when the oil capital of the world was getting a little tarnished. That title was getting a little tarnished. Because people were starting to think, *You know, maybe we don't have to be headquartered in Tulsa in order to stay in the oil industry.* And so there was that too. And that was where Hewgley really shone, in my view.

Chapter 07 - 8:00

Booker T. Washington

John Erling: Back to race relations, and as you look back now, the 1921 Race Riot, was that anything that you even knew in the early '60s? That it had even happened? Because we were led to believe, I wasn't here, that it certainly wasn't talked about in school, it wasn't talked about in society. And here we had this racial unrest in the '60s, nobody ever referenced the 1921 Race Riot?

Clayton Vaughn: Not particularly. And you're right, it wasn't taught in school, it wasn't a matter of conversation in the community. I don't think there was any kind of coordinated effort to sweep it under the rug, forget it, that sort of thing, it just happened that way. Consequently, a lot of people grew up in town never having heard of it. And it was and remains to this day the largest race riot, by some methods of measurement, in the history of the United States. It's one of those things that just kind of happened and then you sort of have a community collective realization that, "How have we let this happen?" "How do we deal with this thing that went on and is a part of our history that we do not recognize and don't know anything about?"

So then there was a great turnaround and Scott Ellsworth's book came out sometime in that period, which was, probably still is, the definitive work on the Tulsa Race Riot. Scott was a Tulsa native, was white, of course, but the book was the first of its nature that thoroughly researched the riot and what actually occurred. And publication of that book, as much as anything else, created an attitude within the community that, "Yeah, it's okay to talk about this and we should talk about this."

JE: Back to the busing days, do you remember a day when they began to integrate, say, Booker T. Washington and the buses came? Were you a newsperson on the scene? Do you remember covering that?

CV: That might be misunderstood, if you'll forgive me, John, by someone who draws no distinction between forced busing, which was what Tulsa was faced with because of a lawsuit that had been filed against the school system. Forced busing, which means that the law decides, that somebody decides, that you're going to take some black kids and

move them over into white neighborhoods. And you're going to take some white kids and move them into black neighborhoods. And we're going to decide which ones go. That forced busing.

The busing that I think that you're referring to is a situation where you set up a magnet school, which is what Booker T. is and Carver, and in order to get non-neighborhood people to go, in other words, in order to get white people to go, you set up a bus system to make it more convenient. But these were all volunteer whites that are come in. It's quite different than forced busing.

And what happened, in terms of the history of magnet schools, was that the lawsuit was filed. The court said that it's going to go ahead and grant what the plaintiffs want, which is going to be forced busing, unless you can come up with an alternative.

And the alternative they came up with was the Magnet School System. The crown jewel in that system turned out to be Booker T. Washington. It turned into a magnet school in 1975. Ha, the people who ran that were so afraid that they couldn't get white children to go into a black neighborhood, they got people like me and the mayor and three or four others, I think, go over there and teach classes. Come on. Those kind of people, what are they doing in a high school in an instructional thing?

What they were doing was, what we were doing, I guess I should say, was that we were showing that it was okay to go. I taught a broadcasting class there for a year. We all taught, you know, mayor taught civics or something, I don't know. And then they realized, of course, that what they had on their hands was something that they had not anticipated in the least, which was they've got ten times more white kids wanting to go there than they've got slots for.

So they kicked all of us, I mean, I was happy to be relieved from that because I was just totally out of my element trying to teach in a classroom; I had no business there.

So they kicked all of us out and the school became one of the top schools in the country, from an academic standpoint, measured virtually by any way you wanted to measure it. Now you can argue whether it has slipped from those early golden days or not but the fact is that in its heyday, which is the first fifteen or twenty years of Booker T. Washington, it was a remarkable, remarkable achievement.

JE: I don't know if it needs to be stated but we should say that Booker T. was a black school. And Dr. Bruce Howell was superintendent at that time, and so he was the leader of that.

And Nancy McDonald was a volunteer to the education system. And the two of them were of great leadership in this.

CV: Yeah, Nancy was, I suspect, a volunteer. But that is so short a description of what she actually did, because more than any other person, in my view, she was the one who set the standards for that school. She was the one that got on the phone and encouraged

her friends and got on the phone and encouraged other people to go and talked teachers into going there. And had the vision necessary to see things like the International Baccalaureate Program start there, which still exists.

If they're ever going to name the magnet schools after anybody, my nomination would be Nancy McDonald.

JE: Yeah. Dr. Howell talks about taking one or two of the really sharp Booker T. Washington kids, they would just go into living rooms of white, Southern, whatever direction of Tulsa, and this young man would come in and speak about how great a school it was. And he said he just put on a show. And white parents felt really about, "Well, if this young man is there and that's the kind of blacks my children are going to be around," it helped sell the program.

CV: Um-hmm (affirmative). Yeah, they pulled out all the stops on that and did a remarkably good job. And they had other people who were equally active and, Aloah Kincaid, for example, Harvard educated and wife of a very successful attorney here in town. She met her husband at Harvard because they were both on the debate team. So she went over and singlehandedly set up a debate program at Booker T., which resulted in national titles for high schools.

So you had these various elements coming together to provide this wonderful learning situation for the children. And you had the feeling that it was something really exciting, something really new and innovative. You sort of lost track of the fact that 50 percent of the people were black—

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

CV: . . . 50 percent of the people were white. Although it took a long time to get a white Mr. Hornet, long time. My youngest son, Dillon, who must have graduated twenty years ago or something, I don't know at this point, he was runner-up for Mr. Hornet, and that's the first time a white kid had gotten that far.

JE: Explain Mr. Hornet.

CV: Mr. Hornet's like the school king, you know, they had a corresponding female, something or other.

JE: I might mention that in this oral history library, both Nancy McDonald and Dr. Bruce Howell have been interviewed for the exact time period that we're talking about here.

CV: Um-hmm (affirmative), good.

JE: So for those of you who are interested in that, you can reference their interviews in this library.

Chapter 08 - 7:40**Important News Stories**

John Erling: Stories, were there weather stories, tornado stories that you remember that were big at KAKC or that you may have covered?

Clayton Vaughn: Well, sure, at KAKCC. One of the big stories was the annual flooding of the City of Tulsa, the Brookside area, because Keystone Dam hadn't been built. So we had to deal with that all the time.

Our studios were in a building that no longer exists. It was the American Airlines Building at 910 South Boston. It was at 9th and Boston, I guess. But we were on the top floor of a ten- or eleven-story building and there was nothing but glass out on one side of it to the south. So we could essentially see Brookside, just from looking out the window.

And I'll go ahead and make this confession because I've made it publically before and I certainly couldn't deny it because it is true, that on more than one occasion, I would see a fixed-wing aircraft over a flood zone. You know, just doing big circles, it was obviously somebody looking at it. And I would go in and tell the disc jockey that it was time for a flood report.

They would put me on and I would never say that I was in an airplane, but they would put propeller noise under it. And I would describe how, you know, "People on Brookside are still facing three feet of water that is coming into some of the homes and is reaching almost to Cincinnati Avenue." And if anybody would look up they'd see an airplane, you know, at the same time that they were hearing propeller noise over my report.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

CV: Probably the best decision I ever made at KAKC in the news department was to go off the air. When Kennedy was shot. We were sitting there on that November afternoon and it started coming across the wires. We had no network, we had absolutely no affiliation with a network, never had had one in the history of the new rock and roll management. They could have years ago, I suppose, but certainly not then.

When it became apparent what had happened, I just, um, I went down to the general manager's office and told him what had happened. I think he probably knew. I said, "We can't do this. You've got to get a network and I'm going to stand here until you get one."

He got on the phone, and within five minutes, we had somebody, I don't know who it was, plugged into them, and we were off the air for, like, four days. With our format on the network.

JE: Your station was on the air carrying—

CV: The network.

JE: ... the network.

CV: But you couldn't tell that it was KAKC. We didn't take station breaks, didn't do anything, just, splut [noise he made], shut it off. Pushed on the network plug and let it go. How long did that last? I don't know, I don't remember what day of the week he was shot on, you know, but the funeral—

JE: Friday.

CV: . . . was, like, three or four days later and then Oswald got killed and, uh, it's just a mess, you know. But I've always looked back on that, in terms of my radio career, it's probably the best thing I ever did. Which was give up, recognize that there's a story that you can't do unless you have a certain reach. And that, for all we were, regardless of how successful we were, there are other things that matter more and this is what you've got to do.

JE: But it played to your strength, news, you were news, news, news. And your audience expected news. And they still knew they were still listening to KAKC.

CV: Yeah, probably, you know. I'm not saying that it was a bad decision, I'm just saying it was the only decision that we really could have made at that time.

JE: You served your audience well.

CV: Yeah.

JE: You were twenty-nine years old then.

CV: Well, I was in the slow group.

JE: [laughing] Have any recollection of governors? I'll throw out some names: Howard Edmondson?

CV: Only because he was so much fun. I never knew him personally at all, but, boy, it was fun to be in the news business during prohibition. And that's what J. Howard did, I mean, it was just glorious to see Southern Hills raided and to see the mechanics behind this business of "We're going to get rid of this silly prohibition law and get liquor sales in Oklahoma made legal. And here's how we're going to do it. I'm going to hire this guy," I think his name was Joe Cannon, or something, "he's going to be the enforcer."

So he'd stage raids at all these private clubs where people had been drinking out of brown bags and unlabeled bottles at the bar for, you know, fifty years, or something. And he shut them down, just closed the door.

Had the election, and we've got liquor by the drink instead of liquor by the wink. And Oklahoma finally joins the rest of the world, in terms of trying to regulate and make some money out of something that people are already doing and are going to continue to do regardless of what kind of laws you have. And we're still on the wrong path, we haven't learned a damned thing from that, as a country, in how we deal with narcotics.

We're just fighting prohibition all over again. The Al Capones have become the Mexican drug lords. And by any standard you want to use. You know, the war on drugs was a phrase that was first used by Richard Nixon. I think in his first administration.

“We’re going to have a war drugs and we’re going to clean this stuff up. You’re not going to have to worry about this anymore and here’s what we’re going to do.”

Okay, since that time, with all of this money spent by any standard you want to consider, quality has never been higher. Availability has never been easier. Price has never been cheaper than what it is right now. We’ve got more of it, more readily available, at lower cost. I don’t know whether more people are using or not, but until we can figure out, as a country, that the way to shut this down, or at least get a handle on it, is to take the money out of it.

So you decriminalize it and you tax it, but you make it available. And sure, you’re going to get some people who are going to start on marijuana and they’re going to end up on heroin. Well, guess what? We’ve got people today that are starting on marijuana and they’re getting up to heroin. Except that they’re not jacking cars, if you do it the right way. What they’re doing is that they’re getting some treatment, if they can be identified, caught, talked into it, because they’re sick, they’re addicted. And you’re not going to have people with AK-47s in your streets shooting each other for control of this business. That’s out of the arms race, this is probably the dumbest, stupidest thing that this country has ever done.

And it just can’t figure out what the problem is. Well, the problem is the money.

JE: We might point out that—

CV: Other than that, I’ll tell you what I really think about it if you want to talk some more.

JE: . . . that generations not even born will listen back, and this is the year 2010, and what Clayton has just described is an attitude out there. And he’s described both what should be and what is going on right now. So that was a good perspective.

Chapter 09 - 9:47

KOTV

John Erling: But we’ve talked about 1964, you’re beginning to leave radio in 1964, and you’re going to television.

Clayton Vaughn: Right. A friend of mine, Jim Hartz, who has a KRMG background, incidentally, Mr. Erling, went over from KRMG, as I recall, to KOTV as the news anchor. And the legend is, and I’m not sure that this is true, but this is what is told, the legend is that there was a man from NBC who was in town and got stuck in town, couldn’t get back out for some reason, and was in the Mayo Hotel and turned on the TV, and there was Hartz. And thought he was so good that he eventually offered him a job, which Hartz took, as the

local anchor for WNBC, I mean, you talk about a great local job and a jump like that to there, it's just remarkable.

But strange things really happened in television during that entire period of time. Jim went on to a very nice career and worked for the network for a time. Everybody who works an NBC owned and operated station works for the network, if you're in the news department. But at any rate, he was cohost of *The Today's Show* with Barbara Walters and had a successful career.

When Hartz was contacted by this NBC representative, he went to the manager of the station, KOTV, a guy named George Stephens, and said, "Look, I've got this offer. What do I do? And I'm contract here to work for you."

He said, "Well, that's too good to pass up, but, let's just put it this way, if you find somebody who can replace you here at KOTV, you go with our blessings."

He picked up the phone, called me, and said, "Want to come over?" and explained the situation briefly, and I said, "Sure." So I did.

Hartz went to NBC and that's how that happened.

JE: Jim Hartz, you had established a relationship or he just knew of you as a newsman?

CV: Oh, we were friendly. You know how it is in the broadcasting community. You're aware of other people who are there and in most cases, at least in Jim and mine, we had talked and met several times.

JE: So you came on as a news director in '64.

CV: No, I was a news director, I think, in '65, actually. Um, maybe it was late '64. It wasn't first day I walked in the door, I know that, because there essentially was no news director when I walked in the door. I think it was just kind of a group thing or somebody had the title for maybe a few months or something. But, yeah, from a practical standpoint, yeah, I ran the operation.

JE: You come in and your first job is as what, at KOTV then?

CV: Reporter.

JE: Just a reporter.

CV: And an anchor, no, I was the anchor too.

JE: Oh, you came in as anchor as your first job?

CV: Yeah, pretty much. It may have taken thirty days or something like that. But that—

JE: That was the intent to have you come in as anchor.

CV: Yeah, right, that's what—

JE: And so you were replacing Jim Hartz?

CV: That's what Hartz was doing was the primary anchor. I don't know who was doing it on the weekends or even if we had a weekend newscast. We were only doing fifteen-minute newscasts at that point.

JE: So this was a complete new deal. Had you thought, *Boy, I want to be a newsman on television?* Have aspirations?

CV: No, never gave it a thought, never gave it a thought. First time I was on was a live shot in which we strung cables from the KOTV studios to the courthouse for an election. And I was standing on top of a counter in the election board offices in a room just jammed with people. And I wanted to talk to Tommy D. Frazier. Uh, remarkable guy, Democrat, former chairman of the, may have been at that time, chairman of the local Democratic party. But wheelchair bound because of a World War II injury.

So there I was, standing on the top of a counter, in a crowded room, one microphone, one camera, literally reaching down below my foot level to interview Tommy Frazier. It was really interesting. I thank God so much there is a lack of video tape for some of this kind of stuff that was done. Well, actually, I would like to see it now. I think I'm mellow enough that I could stand it.

JE: Other personalities at KOTV at that time when you came on?

CV: I think Cy Tuma had already moved on. I think Bill Hyden may have been working there at the time. I think Betty Boyd was still there, before she moved to Channel 8. Cy also moved to Channel 8, but not in the news department. He became what's call their booth announcer, the guy who did all the station breaks and that sort of thing, commercials. I just don't remember the timing of all of those people.

I remember Lee Woodward developed Lionel there for a kid show, actually, and I don't know who it was who set him up doing the weather with a hand puppet. But I was a great fan of Woody's. I always thought that he was the quickest person I'd ever worked with on TV, still do. I mean, you can say something just terribly embarrassing and dumb and Woody would bail you ought and make you look golden. He was really good.

Mack Creager, one time, a sports guy, we were in chairs at the anchor desk. We had wheels on them. Mack was really taking it easy because, you know, you'd run the sports after the weather and so Mack was kind of leaning back and wasn't paying much attention. And rolled off of the set, during Woodward, who was right next to him, three feet away. And Mack, in the middle of Woodward's weather cast, you can see just part of his body falling across the set and this loud crash that happens when he hit the floor.

And Woody just looked down at him for a moment and said, "What can I do for you, Mack?" [both laughing]

The guy was so unflappable, it's just remarkable.

JE: What's the story of Mack and the reason he left KOTV?

CV: Well, I don't know why he left KOTV, you're probably talking about the time that he gave the finger to a live TV audience during a *Mannix* episode and was suspended for, like, two or three days. Is that what you're talking about?

JE: I guess it is, so he was never fired . . . ?

CV: No, I don't think so, he should not have been. The director who punched him up should have been fired. That's when I was in California, so that was—

JE: Okay.

CV: . . . in '70 or '71. And George Stephens, who was the manager, called me in LA the day after that happened and described what happened. And I told him what he ought to do.

He said, "Well, I got to suspend Mack. And I can't fire the other guy."

"You know, well, okay. Do what you have to do." But what happened was that Mack had finished writing his copy early and the format called for a three-shot: news, weather, sports, it wasn't a double anchor so I guess it was Pitcock who was doing the news, Woody was probably doing the weather, and Mack was doing the sports.

So Mack finishes, and Mack has been watching this episode of *Mannix* that plays from nine to ten, back in the newsroom as he was writing his sports copy. And then in order for that opening three-shot, he gets up at about seven or eight minutes before ten o'clock and goes in and sits on the set and watches the rest of the show from one of the studio monitors sitting right down there on the floor next to the camera.

The director was already in the back, the cameras were already manned, because you have to do some tweaking with them all the time, even if it's the same one in the same situation all the time. The director is capable of showing a particular camera to a particular monitor. And what he did was, the camera that was aimed at Mack had a fairly tight shot and they were just setting it up and color balancing it, or whatever they call it, of Mack. And if you're back in the control room you can put that picture on the monitor. And everybody knows that you don't put that on the air, you're just putting it on one monitor.

Well, the director hit the wrong buttons. So instead of the *Mannix* show, which was in its climax, because it was, you know, five minutes before ten, or whatever, here comes Mack's head shot and he's looking at it. *Mannix*, schlep, [sound he makes] his own head shot, he knows what it is. So he just shoots the bone to the camera, you know, middle finger to the camera, and Kulachek was the guy who was directing the show, Kulachek punches him out after four or five seconds, but it's really obvious what has happened because he has been on live. So the viewing audience, you're sitting at home, you're watching *Mannix* and it's the climax of the show, and, all of a sudden, here's a picture of Mack Creager giving you the finger.

It was, I suppose, probably between five and ten seconds. And Mack didn't even, they didn't even know it when they did the newscast until some people started phoning in and were very angry. And it was just one of those stupid but eventually really funny things that happened. I mean, nobody got by it and that sort of thing, and it was really not Mack's fault, but you kind of had to do it.

It's sort of the same thing that happened to Beth Rengel when she said, I shouldn't really say what she said, but she said, uh, "Godd__" (fill in the blanks) over at Channel 8. And, actually, I think she did get fired for that. But she just violated, they just violate the rule that all cameras are hot and all mics are live. And if you've been in broadcasting long enough it's the first thing you learn.

Chapter 10 - 7:45

1968 Convention

John Erling: You're the news anchor at KOTV from '65 until '69. You go to KABC-TV.

Clayton Vaughn: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: So in that body of time, is there anything memorable that you think you were covering between '65 and '69 in Tulsa?

CV: There were a lot of things. The first political convention I went to was the Republican Convention in 1964 in San Francisco. And then I went to the Republican Convention in 1968 in Miami. And then I went to the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in '68.

JE: Okay.

CV: And that was a memorable occurrence.

JE: Tell us why.

CV: Well, because it turned into a police riot because it was the year that Bobby Kennedy was shot. It was the year that Martin Luther King was shot. It was the year that race became a literally fire and ashes story and event.

Well, one of the things we do in this business, and we do it because we're not being accurate enough, is that we confuse sometimes story with event. And we should not do that. I say the story about the '68 Convention. What you're talking about is the event of the '68 Convention, what actually happened up there.

I wouldn't have had as good a seat if it hadn't been for Fred Harris, who at that time was a United States senator from Oklahoma. Fred was the chairman of the DNC, the Democratic National Committee. Because normally at a political convention the reason that somebody like me from Tulsa or Oklahoma goes is that you go to cover the Oklahoma delegation, whatever they're doing.

But in terms of the protocol, housing protocol, for example, which is what's pertinent here, for conventions the larger delegations, the delegations that really mean something, you know, California, New York, Illinois, all those places, get all of the great hotels. And right down by the convention, you know.

And the Oklahoma delegation is out at a Motel 6 someplace three miles out of town. But this year, because of Harris, we were in the Convention Headquarters Hotel, which was the site of the riot. It was right across the street from where kids were getting busted up.

I saw police throw a demonstrator through the plate glass window of a bar on the first floor of our hotel. Then come around and arrest him for breaking and entering and drag him out. The thing got so bad that they were throwing bags of urine and defecation out of windows to splatter on the street. There were smoke bombs and stink bombs in the lobby and the elevators didn't work. I mean, everybody had to evacuate the hotel.

And then there was this full-fledged police riot. A lot of things were learned there, but for me, my personal experience, it was: You can't always trust a cop. I'd always been raised, it was embedded somewhere in my psyche that if I'm in trouble, get a cop. He or she will help. In this case, they hit you in the head. Press credentials don't count. We're among the enemy.

And I'm not saying that all the Chicago cops were bad, but this was later defined and classified as what has come to be known now, because of that, as a police riot. It was such a sea change, combined with all the rest of the stuff that was going on there. Johnson, of course, saying that he was out. Humphrey was in, you know, the Vietnam War was going on, there were riots going on, they were shooting Kennedy, they were shooting—it was a terrible period, 1968 was probably the high point, or the low point, depending on how you look at it, of that entire '60s thing that was going on that was the protest part of the '60s.

There were other things that were associated with it in terms of music and lifestyle. The birth control pill, which may have been the greatest cultural changer that the world had known. It put sex in a totally different position, from which we're still trying to figure out how it works exactly, and no one's come up with an answer. But at least it changed the playing field on that. Changed the playing field on race relations. It changed the playing field on music. It changed the playing field on what young people are supposed to do. It changed the playing field on your right, your duty, to disagree with your government. But the question was: How do you do it? Do you set something on fire or do you call a rally? Both of those decisions were made, some of them too many times.

JE: But was Vietnam perhaps the driving issue there at the convention? Protesting because here is a war that really hadn't been declared and we had a draft on and so we had that going on in the country.

CV: [Sigh] I don't know. It's difficult for me. Vietnam was part of what was going on in the '60s. Now whether Woodstock would have occurred with Vietnam being there, I can't say that, it takes somebody a lot smarter than me to try figure that out. But the '60s, as many of those mega events and cultural changes were, it was a confluence of a number of things. Vietnam was certainly a major part of it.

JE: You went to Vietnam as a reporter.

CV: Yes.

JE: In '68?

CV: Yes.

JE: What were you reporting? What was your angle?

CV: Uh, it was a promotion really. We asked viewers for the names and units of family members or friends who were serving in Vietnam. We collected, I don't know, hundreds of those, and went there, actually twice, I did it once and Pitcock did it once. And tried to find as many of them as we could and interview them and see how they were doing and what they were doing and what they felt and that kind of thing. It is what is called in the industry, a home-towner. We weren't there to cover the war, and everybody was doing it, I mean, there were television stations all over the country who had reporters in Vietnam but they weren't covering the war, they were covering the people who were from their particular markets.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative). You mentioned Bill Pitcock.

CV: Yes.

JE: Was he a news anchor after you?

CV: Concurrent. We worked—

JE: You—

CV: . . . together for a long time.

JE: You were co-anchors?

CV: No, I don't think, well, we may have been, but that was back in the days when anchors were supposed to be men and they were supposed to be single. You didn't do double anchors, you had a single male anchor.

The way it finally worked out, I don't know the specific history of it, I did the six, Bill did the ten. We may have done some co-anchoring but it would have been rare.

JE: So you had two anchors, six and ten?

CV: Yeah.

JE: And that went on for a number of years?

CV: Oh, yeah, until dual anchors were forced on us. At KOTV it happened in 1976.

JE: Who became your co-anchor?

CV: Ah, I don't remember. There have been so many that it just gets lost in the mists of time, John.

Chapter 11 - 8:55
KABC Los Angeles

John Erling: Did we flesh out the riot in '68 in Chicago? Was there more to the story? Did I move on to fast to something else? Did you have any more personal experiences you—

Clayton Vaughn: No, you just asked what happened in the '60s that I recall while I was at KOTV, and that was one of the things.

JE: What—

CV: And we were doing all of the regular local stuff that we should have done in the '60s. I guess the only thing that I can point to with some degree of pride in the '60s, that I was responsible for, at least, we were the first station in Tulsa to cover the legislature. Ha, you can say what you want about the legislature but it was just as bad then as it is now. But it was also just as important.

I hired the first black television anchor. I hired the first female anchor.

JE: Can you put names to those? The first black television anchor?

CV: That would have been Dale Hogg. Those kinds of things happened during that particular time.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

CV: There would come a time at KOTV, but this is going down the road a little bit starting in '71 when there were a lot of changes, at that point. And when we had new management in '76, all of that stopped. So that's why I know those dates so well.

JE: But in 1969, you go to Los Angeles.

CV: Yeah, ABC called, just out of the blue. I think what happened was that we were more than reasonably successful at KOTV. And when you have something like that happen in the market in broadcasting, radio or TV, sometimes your competitors will tell people like agents that there's a situation going on in Tulsa. Channel 8, for example, may want to get somebody from Channel 6 out of the market, so the agent goes around and looks for stations who are looking for people and I think that's what happened in this case.

Because KABC, which is the ABC owned and operated station in Los Angeles, certainly weren't making a search or anything. They were looking for a third anchor, not a Monday through Friday person, but somebody who could do weekends, solo, and be a reporter three days a week.

That's the job that they had and they called just totally out of the blue. I went out there and there weren't any contract negotiations, it was, you know, "Do you want to do this? Here's the money."

I said, "Sure, if I can get out of my contract." And they let me out, and so went out there.

JE: Significant in your time there, which was from 1969 to 1971—

CV: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: You met your present wife, Nancy.

CV: Right.

JE: Tell us how that came about.

CV: Our seats were assigned together at the Charles Manson murder trial. The Tate-LaBianca murder trial, as it was called. I was working, of course, at KABC and Nancy had graduated a couple of years earlier from college and she was working at an independent television station. I can't remember the call letters.

But at any rate, there was such a demand for seats at the Manson trial on the part of the press that they had to actually reserve part of the public seating behind the bar for the press. And each station had its assigned seat.

Our seats were together and she was really good looking. Still is.

JE: [laughing] What were her reporting skills?

CV: She was a writer, actually. But I think she was of the age and of the temperament that she really wanted to see why Charles Manson could attract young otherwise intelligent women. I'm not sure she'd put it in exactly that kind of phrase, but that's what she was there for.

There was a great mystery about Manson, you know, how did he do what he did? What kind of hold did he have over these people who would join him and live this wretched lifestyle and kill for him? How nutty are we becoming after the tumult and all of this change of the '60s? And here it is, this is right at the end of the '60s, because that's when the Tate-LaBianca killings were. And the emergence of this communal thing that had started in the '60s, and then somehow took this dramatically wrong turn with people like Manson.

So there was a great deal of interest that way.

JE: Right. And can you, just in a nutshell, for our historic sake, explain what happened as there were initially five people that were killed. And why this came to the attention of the nation?

CV: Well, Charlie's band, at the time, included his Family, as it was called, included fifteen or twenty, the number kind of moved in and out. My own view is that their brains were all fried by LSD. It's the first time I'd ever seen anybody who had been under the influence of LSD for a long time. But they were really spooky. And they were living out on some deserted ranch out north of Los Angeles.

So Charlie tells four of them, one man and three women, all of them under twenty-five, some of them from very good families. No college graduates, I don't think, but some who had been to college, to go to this house in Topanga Canyon, in Los Angeles, it's in the Hollywood Hills, and kill them all.

So they did. One of them happened to be Sharon Tate, who was, at that time, Roman Polanski's wife. She was eight months pregnant and the killings were sadistic. They were knives and ropes and all kinds of bad things. Just terrible.

And then the next night, he takes another group out, still some of the first ones, to another house. He's not so specific about this one. I've forgotten the neighborhood now. "Just go into their house and kill them."

And they did. And it turned out to be LaBiancas, who were middle-aged, white, reasonably wealthy, upper middle class, certainly.

JE: Grocery store chain owner, I believe.

CV: Right. They'd stuck a carving fork into Mrs. LaBianca, I think, left it there. Carved letters on their dead bodies, left messages in blood, you know, the whole thing was just a nightmare.

When I arrived in Los Angeles, that had already happened, but we were still doing things like trying to run down threads of it. And it was KABC, not me, not my crew, but the people who found the gun that was used in both of those. And they did it by retracing what they figured out were the steps of the killers after they did their killing. And what roads they would likely have driven on and where it would be good spots to throw out a gun.

By god, about the second place they looked they found the gun. It was crazy, things like that.

JE: Charlie Manson, was he in the courtroom then?

CV: Oh, yeah, yeah, all the time.

JE: And so what was, what were your—

CV: He was just as nuts as everybody thinks he is, yeah. Big long beard, stuff carved into his forehead, swastikas and things like that. And the girls would have it the next day. They kept them separate, of course, outside the courtroom. But when the girls saw him, that he had this thing in his face, then they would all cut their heads the same way. But they just had this look in their eyes as if they astonished at where they were and they wanted to look around and see as if they were in, huh, I don't know, it's kind of like looking at a zoo.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

CV: Here are these people up there who you have no contact with whatsoever. Although I did come to actually know one of the members of the Family. One of them who was not charged was "Squeaky" Fromme. She just got out of prison, as a matter of fact, because she tried to kill President Ford years later up in Sacramento, I think.

But Squeaky would act as the Family spokesperson, and she would sit on the lawn outside the courthouse and answer any questions that you had. So if you were in TV, then you liked to have sound and you liked to have pictures but you can't take pictures in the courtroom. Couldn't of that. You had some stock footage occasionally that you would get of Manson and the girls walking down the hall. But the only sound you're ever going to get is Squeaky's. So Squeaky was on a lot. I mean, she was interviewed many more minutes than she ever got on the air. Because it's so hard to get anything, that sounded

any place close to sanity, out of her. But at least you could get a comment, you know, “How’s the Family taking this?” That kind of thing. You never knew what she was likely to say but sometimes it would be air-worthy.

Chapter 12 - 8:50

Well, Clayton

Clayton Vaughn: Los Angeles is such a world unto itself, in terms of the media there. I’ll tell you how powerful the media is, which I never knew until I was in LA. I’d been there, not that long, six weeks, two months, tops, probably. And was assigned to go out to Bob Hope’s house. I’ve forgotten where he lived, it’s someplace out in the Valley, San Fernando Valley. He was having a news conference about something.

So we go out there and at any Los Angeles grade A news conference there are going to be fifteen cameras, at least, sometimes twenty, twenty-five, if you count all the network people and all of the local people and some bozo’s in there because nobody checks. God knows how many microphones are up there.

So we’re having this news conference and I’m sitting back behind the cameras like I always do. And Hope finishes his thing, opens it up for questions, and I have a question. I said, “Mr. Hope, da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da, what do you think?”

And he said, “Well, Clayton.”

Whoa! And then I realized that I was his local news guy. He knew my name because I was on television. I was just simply stunned at that.

John Erling: Um-hmm (affirmative).

CV: And I, I’ve never, I’ve never been able to deal with the celebrity part, even at the local level, very well. I’ve never been comfortable with it. I’m always reminded of Boorstin, the great historian who became the Librarian of Congress, won a Pulitzer for history, saying that part of the culture in the United States is being a celebrity simply for being famous. Famous for what? What have you accomplished? What have you done?

My skillset and my tool kit is not very large but that’s one I don’t have, is how to deal with that. When people think that that’s somehow special. When your children think that that’s somehow special, that’s really scary.

JE: You came back to Tulsa in ’71?

CV: Yeah, just after Nancy and I got married. We got married in her family’s backyard in Hollywood. She went to Hollywood High School. She was a pompom girl at Hollywood High School and went to school with Barbara Hershey and a couple of second rate movie

stars, that sort of thing. Learned to dance at Lana Turner's house because one of her friends was Lana Turner's daughter, or something. Strange Hollywood upbringing but she came out of it all right. You know, she graduated from SC, which is no small challenge. The only thing she knew about Oklahoma was that it was someplace before you get to New York, if you're from California.

I was obviously not going to rise any further, I was in no danger of losing the job at KABC. But I wouldn't have become one of their mainline people, I mean, that just wasn't in the cards somehow.

So KOTV called and said that they were in trouble because they hadn't been able to adequately replace me with anybody who was willing, probably, to do what I was doing. And would I come back? I could do anything I wanted.

And I said, "Well, how about an hour at six?" That had never been done.

And they said, "Sure."

So I came back. There were twelve people in the newsroom. I was the thirteenth when we started that hour in 1971. And it went on for five years. If there ever was a golden age for KOTV, maybe for Tulsa television, that was it.

JE: 'Seventy-one to '76, you did that. So your idea for this, was this format being used in Los Angeles? You'd seen it or just—

CV: Oh, in Los Angeles they start at four o'clock in the afternoon and they don't end until seven. So hour-long newscasts in Los Angeles don't mean anything. KABC, I think started at four or four thirty in the afternoon and went until six thirty, something like that. So that was two hours. And there were some independents that went for three and so, long form like that, was not unusual in Los Angeles. It was a little less unusual in New York, but once you get outside either of those places, you didn't see it anywhere.

But I thought it would be fun and challenging and I was so young and unknowledgeable that I didn't know any better that you're not supposed to do that kind of stuff. So we went ahead and did it and we did long-form news stories, which led to things like what Bob Brown started. I remember he went thirteen minutes one time on a maple syrup operation someplace here in Northeast Oklahoma.

And we did Chuck Hole of the Week, which was a thing where you memorialized some pothole that was in the streets because potholes in the streets were kind of a big issue at the time. The very first one of those was done when the station still had a grand piano and I had some piano moving people come in and pick it up and take it out to a street intersection, someplace on a near north side, I don't remember where exactly. But it happened to be the first day of spring.

So I hired a TU music major, rented him a white tie, tux, tails outfit, and had him play Mendelsohn's "Spring Song." God, it was good.

JE: [laughing]

CV: But it was just one of those no holds barred, anything goes, but serious. We were really serious about doing the whole thing. And we weren't afraid of not looking like TV, you know, with all the fancy goo-gaws and all that kind of stuff.

Tape was just coming in, which was making the delivery system a little faster but we didn't have a whole lot of the essentially live equipment that is now the standard. But it was a wonderful time. Developed some close, long-lasting friendships by it, because, you know, you work all day with the same people. And the same people come over to your house at night or you go to theirs or something. And all the spouses and girlfriends and significant others knew one another and knew all the history and all the kids and all that kind of stuff. And it was just a remarkable, remarkable thing to be involved in.

JE: And Channel 6 was the only one doing that in Tulsa.

CV: Yeah, yeah.

JE: And your ratings—

CV: . . . in Oklahoma or Kansas or New Mexico or Texas or anyplace else that I knew of outside of Los Angeles and New York.

Ratings real good for the first half hour, the second half hour fell off a little bit, but not so much that you'd notice.

JE: Did you have network news incorporated into that to—

CV: No, ran it before, ran network news at five thirty—

JE: Okay.

CV: So Cronkite would come on at five thirty and I'd do the six o'clock. I did it as a single. We did about two minutes of sports, because I didn't like sports, didn't think that we needed anything other than the scores. We only did the weather at length so that we could have platform for Woody to screw around, you know, show off, have fun, if he wanted to.

JE: I'm certain though there were times when weather was critical and so that hour served it well.

CV: Well, you, there are times in the broadcast and print journalism business in which, let's take sports because that's the easiest example, but the same thing happens with weather. And I'm not telling you anything you don't know. But when a sports story stops becoming just a sports story and becomes a general news story, there are times in the weather when the weather stops just being current conditions and forecasts to a general news story. A tornado, for example. In sports, it would be the World Series, something like that. The whole Tiger Woods thing would have been general news. That wouldn't have been handled by a sports guy.

So if you're talking about only those stories that meet that threshold, then, yeah, sure we covered those. We covered those as news stories.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

- CV:** Sports guy doesn't have any business doing that. What does he know? I mean, he just knows that Konjonki plays second base for the Dodgers or something.
- JE:** [laughing] Do you remember names? You said it was a good time and there were people perhaps that cut their teeth and you brought them on that are still around? The public might know them, some of these people.
- CV:** Dino Economos, but he's not in the business anymore. Rocky Stegman, he just died about five or ten years ago. Pitcock has passed away. Creager has passed away. Boy, it's tough when you're seventy-five, John, you start losing them.
- Glenda Silvey.
- JE:** Yeah.
- CV:** I hired Glenda for her first TV job. Got one of the great voices in Tulsa. And she's a wonderful person. She's still around. She stayed for a long, long time after I left. Eventually saw the light and got out of the business.

Chapter 13 - 4:20

Names You May Know

John Erling: Do you have recollection of the *Uncanny Film Festival and Camp Meeting*?

Clayton Vaughn: That was Gailard Sartain's thing.

JE: Right.

CV: I was never really involved with that. I knew some of the people who were involved with it. I knew Gailard, certainly. Gailard was an artist as well as a performer, as you probably know. And I had him one time paint a fireplug for me. It turns out that fireplugs are about eight feet tall. Did you know that? I mean, there's only three feet above ground, two and a half, three feet above ground. There's this long stem that's down underground of the thing.

So if you tell the fire department that you'd like to borrow a fireplug, which is what I did, that's what you got, you got the whole thing. Because it's not sawed off in the middle. They plant it, of course, and you just see the top of it. But there was a thing, it must have been in '76, that would have been the bi-centennial and everybody was painting fireplugs, you remember that? Well, we were.

JE: I wouldn't have. That came in the fall of '76.

CV: Okay. Well, before that we were patriotic. Before you got to town, John, we were patriotic. And we painted fireplugs. It didn't start here in Tulsa but it started someplace and someone did it here. And then, "Is it okay with the fire department if we paint this fireplug? But we're going to paint it red, white, and blue," you know, and that sort of thing.

So I had a fireplug brought in to the studio and Gailard painted it, the top of it, at least, I don't remember what colors or anything like that but it was a lesson on how to paint a fireplug since so many people wanted to paint the plugs in their own neighborhood. You could do stuff like that.

I had Gailard also design a "Good News" logo. We were constantly being bombarded in the news business that we don't ever run any good news. Well, it depends on what good news is and it's probably true in part. But when you did have it at least you wanted to make people aware of it. So I had Gailard do me a Gailard painting of what his concept of Good News should be.

And it ended up as a smiley face, not the traditional smiley face, but kind of a cartoon character face, very colorful, rainbows around it, that kind of thing. We made it into a slide so that it would show up over the anchor's shoulder. "There's some good news to report tonight, test scores are up in Tulsa," you know, something like that.

Gailard is also a social friend so I was more than aware of the many facets of both his talent and his personality. He's a remarkable guy.

JE: Jim Millaway and Sherman Oaks.

CV: I knew Millaway only because he occasionally would show up at the station. I've become reacquainted with him recently on another venue. We happened to drink coffee together weekly at the same place.

JE: Gary Busey.

CV: Busey I met a number of times. After he went to Hollywood for good, he came back one time and another person who's name I've forgotten, who's in the production business in Hollywood, got Busey and me and Glenda Silvey together for a taping session about poetry. One of the most bizarre things I think I've ever seen. Fortunately, none of it ever became popular; I hope none of it is even available now, but that was really odd.

The one person who I did know who fits into the kind of category you're talking about is Mary Kay Place. Now there's a remarkable person to come from Tulsa. I put her on the air the very first time she was on TV, as it turns out. I didn't realize it at the time, of course, but she was still at TU and doing something and I did an interview with her.

She reminded me years later that I had done it. Of course I'd forgotten it. But remarkable talent as an actress and particularly as a writer. She won an Emmy, she may have won two Emmys, I don't know, for her writing. One of them was *MASH*, she wrote a *MASH* episode that was a remarkable piece of work. And then she's been in twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, hundred movies, I don't know, as a character actress. Never as a romantic lead, really, but still lives in LA and is remarkably successful. Comes back here occasionally to see her family because her father, of course, was the Park Dean at TU for a long, long time. Nice person.

Chapter 14 - 19:13**Robert Joffe**

John Erling: The Robert Joffe case.

Clayton Vaughn: Have we got time for this?

JE: If you don't—

CV: No, no.

JE: . . . if you want to move on, I understand.

CV: No, no, no, that's all right.

JE: Only because you had listed it.

CV: Ah, it's complicated, which is the only thing that I pre-warn you about so it could take a few minutes. Um, chronologically is the easiest way for me. I was getting my hair cut at the time by a guy who was obviously out of the closet gay. I had been using him for a year or something like that and it was at the point where I could go in at the appointed time, sit in the chair, and wouldn't have to tell him a thing. You know, he knew exactly how I wanted it and he'd do a good job and that was that.

I walk in one morning, afternoon, whatever, and he said, "Did you hear that Robert Joffe is getting married?"

And I said, "Well, no, actually."

He said, "Well, there's a picture of him in the paper at a Big Brother's event with a woman who is his fiancé."

I said, "Well, yeah, okay."

"Well," he said, "Joffe's gay."

I go, "Wait a minute, what are you talking about?"

At this point, you need to know that Robert Joffe worked for KOTV, and he was a reporter, would-be anchor, young man, early twenties, came from Louisville or Knoxville, or someplace like that, through Dallas before he got to Tulsa. He had, as a reporter, established a reputation for "You've got a friend." Remember that song "You've Got a Friend"?

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

CV: And he used it as a promotional device to do a story using Big Brothers, showing how this guy has befriended this young man over there and the big brother and the little brother and this is the way that you can get involved in this. You know, nice thing, but kind of formulaic television promotion, but legitimate enough in the sense. I mean, it's okay, the charity is fine, and, you know, it's a way to put some good news on the air so people shouldn't mind.

The problem was that about a year earlier, Big Brothers had had a big scandal because one of their participants, one of the big brothers, was found to have been gay, or

at least that was the allegation, and that he had hit upon or had relations with assigned little brother.

Well, it pretty much blew up the Big Brothers organization. They dissolved the board, set up an entirely new screening process. This has nothing to do with whether homosexuals are more pedophiles than straight people, because it doesn't, you know, it had nothing to do with that. But the public perception was something altogether different. And this is before Robert comes to town.

Robert comes to town and establishes this "You've got a friend," thing. He's on every week, it's very identifiable that it's him doing this kind of thing. Ta-da-ta-da-ta-da, be a big brother and, you know, this is the way you can serve the community, and all of this, it's very happy and all that kind of stuff. And if he were gay and if he were gay enough so that my hairdresser knew it, then there might be a problem if it became known in the community that we had a gay reporter who not only was a member of Big Brothers, but a spokesman for them on KOTV.

So I asked this hairdresser, I said, "You know, what are you talking about?" I said, "Robert can't be gay." I said, "How do you know? What's your source for this?"

He said, "Well, it's me." He said, "I had an encounter with him."

At that point, I became really concerned and I said, "Well, will you give me the broad brush background of it?"

And he told me about meeting him in a bar and they went to either his house or Robert's house or something and had this encounter. Described it very graphically.

I said, "How many people know this?"

He said, "I don't know." He said, "I assumed everybody knew he was gay."

And I said, "Have you seen him out in gay bars?"

"No."

"Have you seen him do this with more than just yourself or do you know of anybody else?"

"No. But he didn't make any secret about who he was," he said, "you know, what his name was. And I think he was kind of offended that I didn't know that he was on TV." This guy didn't watch TV, obviously.

So I went back to the station and I told the news director enough of it so that the news director said, "Wait a minute, we've got to talk to the manager."

So I went down and I talked to the manager. And at that point, I essentially was out of the loop, except for one other thing. The manager couldn't believe the story, so he said to the news director and I, who were sitting in his office, he said, "Clayton, contact this person and see if it's okay if you take a news director with you and go out and talk to this guy and see what his story is. When there's somebody other than you that we're depending on for this link."

Set up the meeting, go to the house, exactly the same story. I'm out of the conversation, the only thing I do is say, "This is who, and who is this, and, you know, what's up?"

The news director comes back to the station, and at this point, I'm not in the manager's loop anymore. And a number of things occur, including the manager calling in Joffe and saying, "Is there any truth in this? You know, where are we in this?"

Joffe denies everything emphatically. There had been some dissatisfaction with his work on a number of levels and eventually, because he just couldn't get over the uneasy feeling that he was getting about the whole thing, the manager let him go. Fired him, essentially.

JE: For?

CV: Well, Oklahoma's an "at will" state and you didn't have a contract, you don't have to have a reason. According to his trial testimony the manager never gave Joffe a reason. Joffe asked a lot but the manager, having no legal obligation to do so, and seeing that there might be a downside if he did, and if it was because of the gay thing, which the manager maintains it was not, so, you know, I mean, who knows what was going on.

So Joffe is away from the station. Joffe sues, brings in a law firm, sues for \$10 or \$11 million, claiming deliberate infliction of emotional distress or something. And the lid blows off the whole thing. You know, starts making the papers. Big Brothers very quietly withdraws. Robert severs his association from Big Brothers, from which he has won a national award. And we start doing, as you do in cases like that, you start doing discovery.

Then, I don't know, six months in, something like that, Joffe, who by this time has moved back to Dallas, commits suicide. He is found in his car in a parking garage in Dallas and he has hooked the exhaust up to go into the cabin. So he's dead, a suicide.

By that time, he's married, because he's gotten married in the intervening time. So his wife inherits the lawsuit, essentially. And she continues it and, at that time, a local attorney named Gary Richardson becomes involved in the case.

Now Gary has offices in at least Tulsa and at least Texas in Dallas. Does a lot of work in Texas. And just in the past couple of three years had won the largest damage suit for infliction of emotional distress or whatever that thing is, for a district attorney, I think, some kind of prosecuting attorney, government official in Waco, from a station in Waco that said something about him, did some kind of report on him, which turned out to be suable. And they sued and Gary won a \$55 million award.

The station in Waco was owned by the corporation in Dallas called the Belo Corporation, which also owned KOTV in Tulsa. So Richardson enters the Tulsa suit. And we eventually go to trial. There are so many intervening things that it just boggles the mind at this point, but we eventually go to trial.

Our side discovered, and I don't even know how, I think somebody gave us an anonymous tip or something that a lawyer discovered, that Joffe had been in a dispute

in Knoxville or Louisville or wherever he lived when he was a high school student and worked as an intern at a local television station, without pay. And all of a sudden, started complaining about somebody who was threatening him with written notes. They were threatening to kill him and the lead anchor, a person there who was much like the position that I had.

He said two or three of them, and he finally decided to go to the police. The police said, "Where are the notes?"

And he said, "Well, I tore them up because I didn't want my family to be upset. I didn't want my mother and dad to be upset."

"Okay. Well, if it happens again, save the notes, okay?"

He says, "Okay." So then he says the phone calls started. Some guy on the phone calls him and threatens both him and the anchor with, I don't know, some kind of harm or death or something, I don't know.

So they put a tap on the phone and Robert knew about it. And the phone calls stopped. But Robert was still so concerned about it that he went to the management and said, "Look, my parents know about this now and I'm really kind of concerned and, you know, they're real jittery and everything. Won't you help us out?"

So the station hires an off-duty police officer to kind of babysit Joffe's house, where he lives with his parents. And his house is on a street and it has a big bay window in front of it. And the detective is there the next night or two or three nights later and is sitting in the living room and somebody fires a shot through the glass. Misses his head by about a foot, slams into a wall.

The detective sees nothing other than a car driving away. Well, later it turns out that Joffe was in the car, actually, this is a matter of public record except it's a juvenile thing so it's not sealed, but it's not usable, as it turned out. But Joffe and two of his high school chums had driven by and one of them had a gun, I don't know who, doesn't matter, and had fired the shot.

So they get Joffe and the two guys together. The two guys confess that they were with Joffe when the shot was fired.

Joffe confesses that the whole thing was a hoax. He gets fired from his TV job and finishes up school.

In the meantime, the cop sues Mr. and Mrs. Joffe for something, god knows what, based on the fact that somebody took a shot at him and they should have known better because it was their son who committed the hoax that led to the shooting.

Okay, we find out about that when our side takes attorneys back to Louisville, Knoxville, wherever, and gets a deposition from the police officer involved and gets a file of the court record of the case. And it's pretty straightforward as to what happened.

Except that Joffe then kills himself a week after that. [big sigh]

Well, we finally get to trial. There are eight or nine counts, I don't know. Richardson is a really good plaintiff's lawyer. I mean, cowboy boots and corn pone but, boy, he knows his Oklahoma juries. He's written books about it and he does tapes on it about how to handle people like that.

Three or four of the counts get thrown out before we ever start. They ended up with one or two of the counts out of the original five or six, or three or four, whatever it was. And the money figure has dropped from \$10 or \$12 down to \$4 million.

We have the trial and the jury comes back nine-three, which is enough for a decision on Joffe's estate's side. So we lose the case. It was probably the most highly publicized media case in the history of the community. At least if there was another one I don't know about it, never heard about it. I mean, it was on the front page of the *World* every day and on the front page of the *Tribune* every day. The *Tribune* actually ran the Knoxville story about the cop being shot at through the plate glass and all of that kind of stuff. It ran for one day, never was picked up again.

But the judge decided that because of the ages involved it was not admissible at trial for the Tulsa case. Nor was the fact that Joffe was hired in Dallas as he was a student at SMU as an intern for the news department. And because he was an intern, he didn't have to fill out an employment application, which, among other things, asks, "Have you ever been arrested?"

The woman who was working Joffe's unit at the Dallas station, never asked him about that part of his—he never told the story to anybody because he wouldn't, for obvious reasons. So she was eventually transferred to Tulsa as the news director and she hadn't been here a couple of months but what she offered Joffe a job up here in the news department. Although neither one of them had actually worked in a news department before. It was kind of a public service special documentary unit of some kind, down in Dallas. And because he was coming from our sister station in Dallas he did not have to fill out an employment application in Tulsa either, which would have shown, if he had answered it correctly, that he had been arrested before.

So all of that stuff was out there but none of it got into the trial because of the technicalities involved, I suppose. And we lost the case. It was a terrible, terrible PR disaster for me, personally. I was held up as the villain in the whole deal. I mean, the Richardson story was, the defense story, the plaintiff's story was that I was afraid of Joffe as a competitor and that he was going to get my job. So I make up this wild, ludicrous, false story in order to get rid of Joffe.

And the jury came down against us. I eventually got taken off of the six o'clock, which I think I was doing at the time. And after focus groups came up and said, you know, "The

guy's a rat, I'm never going to watch him again." They were totally like that but it took a long time, a long time, really, for my reputation to heal, as it was. And I'm not sure that it totally ever did. There may still be people out there who think that I'm a biased, murderous kind of person.

Um, to my credit, and I suppose this is self-serving, but most of the people who have heard the story, even including those who are in the media, say I could not have done anything else other than what I did. Because the risks were too high to the station in that kind of a situation to have this guy identified with a public service organization that has, as one of its qualifications, that you can't have homosexuals in it. Regardless of how irrational that might be. It's certainly not supported by the evidence.

There is part of the community who believes that way and, as a matter of fact, the organization itself has set up the barriers for that. Whether that's justified may be another thing.

But they still exist and the feeling, I'm sure, exists on the part of some people that I did something terribly, terribly wrong there. But you move on.

JE: But noting again there had been a Big Brothers story that was vague about a child who had been molested by a homosexual.

CV: Right.

JE: So that is a big background to this.

CV: Oh, yeah, yeah, right.

JE: If that story hadn't happened I don't know if that would have done anything to your brain or not.

CV: If that story hadn't happened, if he hadn't been associated with Big Brothers and Big Sisters, I don't know. But the story happened and he was.

JE: Right.

CV: That was enough to convince me that my obligation to the station was at least to say, "This is out there." I didn't say it was true. I didn't say whether I believed it or not. I'm saying I heard it from a man who is openly gay.

JE: So then the decision was appealed.

CV: Oh, it was appealed all over the place, up to the highest you can appeal it. And by the time it got through with it, it was \$5 million. I saw the check. It was \$5 million and change.

JE: That Robert Joffe's widow received?

CV: Yes. After the attorney's took their share of it. When Gary won the lawsuit in Texas, his black Mercedes S Class showed up with a vanity plate on it that said, "Big Win."

Chapter 15 - 6:54**24-hour News**

John Erling: The Joffe case, that was in the early '90s.

Clayton Vaughn: Yeah.

JE: The Joffe case, but before then, I jumped ahead because you had also gone in '78 and '79 to New York.

CV: Right. I was going to fix PBS's news service. But I got to New York and figured out that was the dumbest thing that I think I'd ever done. But I did have a good time. I was the founding anchor of the *New Jersey Nightly News*, which was a program that was run, still is, on the New Jersey Public Television Network and on WNET, which is public TV for New York, as a joint venture.

I went there with some kind of idea that I was going to be able to make a network newscast with a local hole in it that local public television stations could plug in and fill. And public television just doesn't work that way. But it took me a while to figure that out.

JE: And you came back again.

CV: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: Who in the news business, as you were into it, did you look up to? Cronkite, Seavareid?

CV: Well, the whole CBS group were men of distinction, I think, and were valiant in their efforts to make television work. We forget sometimes that TV did not work at one time. I mean, it's like TiVo now, it's like part of the reference system is that television is here, it's always been here, and the reason I mentioned TiVo is that if you want to watch a particular program you have to watch that station at that time. Now TiVo has meant, DVDs mean, that you can watch it at any time that you want. It's changed the nature of television.

Television itself changed the nature of journalism and changed the culture of the United States and the whole world, as far as that's concerned. But it didn't get here until the late '50s. It didn't become universal until sometime in the '60s, where everybody was watching and they were all watching the same three stations, for a time. And that's why Huntley Brinkley and Cronkite were so good because nobody knew what they were doing. They invented this stuff.

The guy who did *60 Minutes*, Don Hewitt, said that he got the idea for keys—a key is the thing that's an identifier or across somebody's chest when you see them on the air—he got that from a menu board in a deli in Chicago, I think. Because he looked up at the menu board and he saw that there was a black thing there with white letters on it.

He's one of the inventors too. We were all inventors. When we did this work in the '60s, and even into the '70s, and local news, it was changing so much because of the technology, if nothing else, that we were into a totally new delivery system.

You can argue that we've taken it to such an extreme now that I just was reading the other day that computers are going to take it another notch. With TV, we can now go anywhere we want and see anything we want. And computers are going to make it so that we can program anything we want. So we all become our own personal program directors.

You can see any show you want, any time you want, and kill all the commercials. They're really scared about that.

JE: Yeah. This 24-hour cycle of news, we have the cable stations, the talking heads, the commentators and all, blending news with comments. We've got Jon Stewart at night mixing serious news with humor. Seems to be a major source of news for many people. What is your take on all of that?

CV: My eldest daughter, who lives in Pennsylvania, emailed a year or so ago. She said, "Dad, I just have so many news sources now that I can't sort them out. What should I do about that? Because I don't want to take up that much time. But I still want to stay informed."

"Well," I said, "do what I do, and it doesn't cost anything, subscribe to the *New York Times* and you can tailor that to include news and sports and fashion and technology and editorials, you can have all of those or none of those. But that way it'll show up on your computer first thing in the morning. And if you read enough of those, at least the general news stories of those, and some of the opinion, because those are people's opinions who know what they're talking about, then you can be relatively safe in saying that, 'Yeah, I think I've got a handle on what's going on in the world.'"

And I said, "I don't know what you do locally. That depends upon your local delivery systems." I said, "I learned a long time ago that whether I learn of something one night as opposed to the next morning doesn't make any difference in terms of the events' importance. Or whether I should be feeling like I'm missing something, in case I don't hear about it. But by the next morning, somebody will have written about it who is a lot smarter than I am. And they're going to tell me. It's going to be in that story, why I should be interested in this. They're going to tell me why it's significant. They're going to tell me why it's changing the culture. They're going to tell me how much it costs. They're going to tell me what it does to my kids or my family or my country or my community.

I just want a filter, I want an editor. That's what we do in the news business. We decide what goes out. That's why this business is so fragile. And now it's in so much danger because we have people who are not putting that standard into what they're producing and calling news. The standard now is "If it bleeds, it leads." That sort of thing. You get two people together so you've got all sides of the story.

Well, that's stupid, in the first place. There's never just two sides to a story, normally there are eight or ten. And if you don't know all of them then you don't know what you're talking about. But they get two people together and they yell at one another and they call that news.

You may find that as entertainment, and if you do, then, you know, God bless you, go on and watch. But don't expect to be informed by it. Don't expect to know how to vote. Don't expect to know what the issues are that affect you and your family and your community, because you're not getting that. What you're getting is a form of entertainment that's masquerading as what news used to be, and still is in some very selected cases. But they're becoming harder and harder to find.

JE: Do you value the news of the written word above the electronic?

CV: Not necessarily. There are some good things on TV, I think. Used to be some good stuff on radio but there's only NPR now. As far as I'm concerned.

Chapter 16 - 8:40

Why Do Birds Flock

John Erling: Advice to students thinking of journalism.

Clayton Vaughn: Don't do it, number one. If you decide that that's what you've got to do, at least don't major in it in school. Which is not something unique to me, in terms of an opinion. I found more than ten or fifteen years ago that that's the prevailing opinion of people for whom I have any respect who are in the business, is that you should spend your university time, undergraduate, especially, learning how to think and how to write and how to be critical of what you are told. And learn how the world works.

So take history, take economics, take premed, take anything, evolutionary biology is what I would take if I had it to do over again. Learn how the mind works, learn how the world works. See all these different things that people are doing and that are available to you. And then if you still want to go into journalism, at least you can write, that's the key to the whole thing.

If you want to go into broadcast journalism, somehow you got to talk. And if you want to go into television, somehow you got to be able to talk when your picture's being taken. So that gets a little more complicated, but it's a craft, it's not a skill, it's a talent, particularly, and anybody, really, can do it.

JE: When you retired from KOTV, in '98—

CV: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: . . . are you saying it was the Joffe case that brought you to that point?

CV: Oh, no, huh-uh (negative).

JE: Because you'd lived past that by, uh—

CV: Yeah, yeah, by five years.

JE: . . . a few years, five years.

CV: Yeah, right. It doesn't matter the time length. I think the problem that it created with the audience had gone away, at that point, in large part. I retired because I was a year away from retirement anyway. I was sixty-four, and Belo, remember the company that owned us down in Dallas, because of the failing newspaper business, they also owned the *Dallas Morning News*, was trying to get rid of some, I don't think I can be sued for this, I hope not. They were trying to get rid of some longtime newspaper employees whose jobs essentially had been taken away by technology. They didn't need typesetters anymore, people like that. That kind of thing. A lot of that had been mechanized. The technology had just outgrown it.

So they set up a retirement buyout plan and it was based on three things: age, number of years with the company, and salary at the time you leave, or the highest salary in the last five years, or something.

And as it turned out, I was almost sixty-five, because of a contract fluke, not with Belo, but I had been with KOTV and they counted all the pre-Belo time at KOTV, that I had been with Belo for this retirement purpose. And compared to newspaper typesetters, I was making a boatload of money. So my check, I'm not going to say what it is because that would be invasive and proprietary, but they did say that it was the second highest check that they did in the corporation. I don't know who got the highest one, but mine was the second.

And it was just too good to turn down. Otherwise I would have worked another year and I would have lost money, as it turns out, if I had worked another year and then taken retirement.

JE: But you didn't retire, for them you went to the Tulsa Historic Society.

CV: I didn't retire from working, if that's what you mean. Yeah, I laid out about a year, and as it happened, the historical society with which I had always had an association because of a variety of factors, was involved in a building program at its current location on South Peoria in the Woodward Park Complex. And they were about to lose the longtime curator there, a man named Robert Powers, because he was becoming very ill. And he subsequently died, I mean, died in the last three years, I think. So his illness was not really in question. But it came to the point that he could no longer work, really what it amounted to.

So they just needed somebody to come in. They had come into this new property, which had been donated. They had come into a lot of money. Ed Lawson and others with the society raised even more. So you're talking about a little thing that used to be a Mom-and-Pop organization, literally, with one full-time and two part-time employees was now in a \$10 million building project and was handling a lot of money without any bylaws, to speak of. And the books were kept by a guy named Officer Bob.

So they needed somebody to come in and straighten that out. So I worked there for five years or so. And then finally got to the point where I thought it was time, certainly, to have somebody do that who knew something about how to run nonprofits, which I didn't know come-here from sic-'um about. But I could call people. I'm really good at calling people and asking for help. I just claim stupidity and it seems to work more often than not. And people are normally very generous. I don't know whether that's because I've been on TV or because I adopt that attitude, which is always a little self-effacing. And they know that it's not quite right, but at least I'm admitting that you're better off with this, in terms of the information, than I am.

And I say, "I just don't understand this. Will you explain this to me? Please make me understand it and say it in words that I'll understand because I don't know much about this."

And people will give you all kinds of time and help and—

JE: Yeah.

CV: . . . I couldn't be more thankful for the people I ran into, not only in the news business, where I also used that kind of approach, but especially in the Tulsa Historical Society. And I talk to literally thousands of people, who I ask for help, and who readily, almost universally, gave it.

JE: But then you've studied why birds flock and cats drink.

CV: It's actually how birds flock. Birds have really tiny brains. You ever heard the term "birdbrain"?

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

CV: That means because you've got a little tiny brain. How do they figure out how to flock? There's no leader there. There's no direction, particularly, that they're going. You just see a hundred birds, you see a thousand birds, and they're all moving as one, and they're moving through the air in this wonderful formation, which is not military at all. Well, it turns out that if you give objects a universal range of motion in a three-dimensional universe, like the air, and you can fly any way you want to in the air, and you give them three rules. Three rules that anybody, even a birdbrain can understand. You form a flock. The rules are:

Try to match the velocity of other birds in your immediate vicinity.

Number two, avoid other birds, keep a minimum distance from other birds and objects like telephone poles that might hamper your flight, if you had a collision.

And number three is, always move toward what you perceive to be the center of the group. Now if you impose those rules on randomly moving objects in a three-dimensional universe, you'll get a flock.

Get a school of fish, on the other hand, because they operate with the same kind of rules. When I first heard about that I was really struck by two things. Number one, that's astonishing. And number two, why, why in the world did I not ever question during the

hundreds, thousands, god knows how many times I've seen a flock of birds or a school of fish, why didn't it ever occur to me, *How do they do that?*

That's why I love evolutionary biology. It just presents you with these astounding things and then these beautiful, elegant solutions that evolution by natural selection has come up with to make us who we are and make the world what it is and populate it with all of these wonderful, fantastic creatures that we're killing off in just absurdly large numbers. But that's another problem.

JE: Well, I would say that Tulsa has been a benefactor of that career chosen in Cushing, Oklahoma, as a high school lad, what you've contributed to our town, our community, our counties, we're very fortunate to have had you here.

CV: Well, you're very gracious to say that. I enjoyed this interview too, John.

JE: Well, thank you, because you are an interviewer, so I enjoyed it as well. I can say nobody has made me laugh as hard as you did. So thank you for this. Generations to come will look back and say, "Hey, that was a fun man, I wish I could have known him."

CV: Thank you, John.

JE: You're welcome.

Chapter 17 - 0:33

Conclusion

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

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