

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Announcer: Danna Sue Walker wrote the “People and Places” column six days a week in The Tulsa World for at least 24 years. Her column kept readers informed about the fundraisers and events for many of the city’s nonprofit organizations, and the column is one of the reasons Tulsa is known as a caring and philanthropic city.

A native of Tulsa, Danna Sue graduated from the University of Tulsa. She joined The World in 1962 as society editor and left to raise her daughters before returning in 1981 to write the column.

She was inducted into the University of Tulsa Communications Hall of Fame in 2005 and received the Bill Crawford Memorial Award for commitment to the arts.

In her oral history interview, Danna Sue talks about living at the Tulsa Country Club, her lifelong friend, and of course, “People and Places” on the podcast and website of VoicesOfOklahoma.com.

Chapter 2 – 8:55 Tulsa Country Club

John Erling (JE): My name is John Erling, and today's date is December 10, 2024. Danna Sue, would you state your full name?

Danna Sue Walker (DSW): Danna Sue Walker Wolf.

JE: And we are recording this oral history interview in the facilities of Voices of Oklahoma. Your birth date?

DSW: November 3, 1941.

JE: Making your present age?

DSW: 83.

JE: 83. Where were you born?

DSW: Tulsa, Oklahoma.

JE: Let's talk about your mother—her name, where she came from, and where she lived.

DSW: Alice Jane Frick was her maiden name. She was from Missouri. Her mother was a wannabe novelist at one time, I think, and that was a long time ago. Her mother went to the University of Missouri, which was very unusual for a woman in that era. Mother was very zany, kind of a Lucille Ball-type person. She and my father were the most romantic couple ever. He would be out hunting and pick flowers for her to bring home.

JE: Well, let's bring him in. His name?

DSW: Danner Grimes.

JE: All right, but your mother—her personality—she apparently was very outgoing?

DSW: Very outgoing. As I say, kind of a Lucille Ball-type person. Super smart, but came off as just kind of a zany character.

JE: So then, your father's personality—where was he born and where did he grow up?

DSW: He was born in Fort Smith, Arkansas, I think, and moved to Texas. His mother was one of the first non-Indian schoolteachers in Oklahoma.

JE: Say that again?

DSW: His mother was the first white schoolteacher in Oklahoma.

JE: Really? I wonder where she taught school. Do you know?

DSW: She would talk about it—some little tiny schoolhouse with all ages in it, out on the prairie.

JE: So then, your father—what did he do for a living?

DSW: He was the manager of the Tulsa Country Club. He actually started as the assistant manager of the old Tulsa Club because his cousin was the manager at that time.

JE: Was your father a golfer?

DSW: He was a medium golfer. He had the opportunity to do it. When he was very young and first went to the Tulsa Country Club -- that was back when the Kennedys were a big, huge family out there -- and Sam Kennedy—I don't know for sure which generation he was—asked Daddy if he wanted to go hunting. Daddy said, "Sure, but I don't have a gun." So Sam lent Daddy his gun or bought him one, something. I think the same thing happened with golf clubs.

JE: OK, so the Kennedys—people probably don't know—was that a prominent family in Tulsa?

DSW: Yes. I don't think they were Indian, but I think they married some Indian people who had headrights, you know, all that stuff.

JE: Were they in oil and gas—the Kennedy family?

DSW: I think so, but I'm not positive. But I think so.

JE: Is there a Kennedy building named after them downtown?

DSW: I think so, yeah. Yeah, and they had big, huge, lovely homes around the Tulsa Country Club, past the golf course.

JE: So that was real toddie-tah then, wasn't it?

DSW: Oh yes.

JE: So then you grew up in that environment. Tell us about that.

DSW: It was wonderful. Mother brought me home from the hospital to the Tulsa Country Club. All the members were like my family. All the waiters were like my family. I got to run all around, and I had a big imagination, so I could be fighting in the jungles, running around the golf course. I'm sure the golfers didn't love it, but I never got in big trouble for it.

JE: "Who is this child running around, and do Mom and Dad know where she is?"

DSW: And then I became—because I was this very curious little girl and an only child—all those people, I loved so much. They took care of me. In fact, I think it made my job at the Tulsa World easier, because when I started

doing that, it was a lot of the same people I was interacting with. They all knew me, and it just was very easy.

JE: So your house then was on the club?

DSW: Near the top floor of the clubhouse.

JE: Oh, really? The top floor? So then they let you come downstairs?

DSW: I mean, all the time. I was just there.

JE: You thought it was your house.

DSW: I thought it was my house. I never even thought differently.

JE: Well then, meals—they would serve meals there?

DSW: Mother didn't learn to cook for years because we just ordered off the menu, and they brought it upstairs.

JE: Wow. Were you living the life of Riley, as we say?

DSW: And even my cocker spaniel, Buff, got special treatment. They brought her a hamburger patty, and this one waiter that I just loved so much—he loved Buff—so he would bring her a hamburger patty and a goblet of ice water. Not fine crystal, but that shape, and that's what Buff had for her meal. Of course, we'd let her out, and she'd run around the club grounds.

There was a men's grill at the bottom of the clubhouse with big glass windows, and Buff would pop up in one of those windows. The guys playing cards would say, "Oh, there's Buff," and they would go and open the door to let her in. Then they had to open another door to let her in the back way, and she would go up through the kitchen, where all the waiters and chefs would feed her. If we had not moved from the Tulsa Country Club, she would have died years earlier because she was a rotund cocker spaniel with all that extra food.

JE: Yeah, yeah. So then, you recall going to school. Where was your elementary school?

DSW: First, it was Lombard. Then it was Osage.

JE: Lombard Elementary?

DSW: Lombard Elementary, then Osage Elementary. Then we moved to the Swan Lake area because Daddy decided he didn't want to stay in that environment forever. Utica Square was just beginning, and whoever was in charge of Utica Square said, "Why don't you open a restaurant out here? Then you won't live down there anymore, and it'll be a different environment." So he did, and he opened Danner's Cafeteria.

JE: Danner's Cafeteria in Utica Square?

DSW: Yes. It used to be the Olive Garden for a while, but now they've changed it. That was the location.

JE: So then you lived near Utica Square?

DSW: Right.

JE: So that brings you to about what age?

DSW: Fifth grade. Then I went to Lincoln Elementary School.

JE: Lincoln Elementary—man, that's three elementaries!

DSW: And then Horace Mann Junior High School.

JE: You went to Horace Mann Junior High, and then from there to Tulsa Central. Did you ever want to be a golfer?

DSW: No, but I went ice skating on the golf course one time. I guess at one point, I wanted to be a ballerina or a figure skater—for about ten minutes.

I remember it so well. It was snowing a little, and Daddy knocked on my door and said, "Do you want to go ice skating on the golf course?" The ice had fallen and was really crystalline, and you could hear it crack. I said, "Yes!" So Mother got me all bundled up, and away we went. It felt like the adventure of forever.

I can still remember how it felt—how the cold pricked my face as I went down the hills with Daddy. A little girl and her daddy—that's everybody's dream.

JE: And look at you, still remembering the feeling of the cold on your cheeks all these years later. That was a pretty special moment.

DSW: Yeah, it was great.

Chapter 3 – 7:11

Acting

John Erling (JE): During this time, you had an aunt and uncle who lived in La Jolla, California, and a family member who was in business with Walt Disney. That must have been quite an experience for you.

Danna Sue Walker (DSW): Yes, that family member was Helen Alvarez. She started Channel 6 television. She was a glam gal—kind of like an Elizabeth Taylor type. Her brother was married to my mother's sister, so we would spend a lot of summers in La Jolla.

JE: Tell us about your experience visiting the set, meeting Walt Disney, and all of that.

DSW: Oh yeah, that was exciting. Of course, I was a big movie fan—I was in seventh or eighth grade at the time. Helen, who was in all these businesses with Disney, said, "OK, I got you a pass, and you're supposed to meet Albert Zugsmith in his office. Then he's going to have someone take you around."

Her mother was with me, of course. We did that, and it was fabulous. I got to talk to different people. Peter Lawford was on set—I got to talk to him. It was one of those movie fantasy experiences. It was fun.

JE: Right, but didn't someone suggest you take a screen test?

DSW: Yes, they did. They gave me a script to take home to Tulsa and look over. Later, my children actually used it to play with and put on little plays.

When I got back to Tulsa, I was having fun with friends, caught up in my life, and I felt like I was on the verge of becoming a movie star. But then I was getting ready for college, and I didn't want to give that up. I'm an only child, and I had a very close best friend, Roxanna Lorton. We were together all the time and lived close to each other. I didn't want to leave her.

So I said, "No, I don't want to do that. Maybe later." But, of course, later

never came. Then you go to college, fall in love, get married, have children—it was a fun experience, though.

JE: Were you offered a contract?

DSW: Yes.

JE: A contract? That's amazing.

DSW: Well, they were serious, but I didn't sign it. That was back in the days when they were trying to find a bunch of little starlets. I think they were interested, but I doubt they threw themselves on the floor when I said no. I was probably just one of many.

JE: Have you talked to Peggy Helmerich about this?

DSW: Yes.

JE: What would you talk to her about?

DSW: I don't even remember our conversations exactly. I just know she had heard about it and asked me about it.

JE: We should mention that Peggy Helmerich, of course, was a movie star before she came to Tulsa to be with Walt Helmerich. So you do have that in common.

DSW: Yes, she made some films. She was Peggy Dow.

JE: Right, right. But you weren't really pursuing a Hollywood dream. If someone had that ambition, they might have jumped at the chance immediately. Since it wasn't on your radar, it was probably easier for you to walk away.

DSW: That's true. But I was very interested in acting. I took acting lessons from Isabel Ronan at Tulsa Central. Since I was a senior, I could leave school and walk to her house for lessons. She lived in a small house, I think with her sister, very near the school.

I loved those lessons. At that age, I had that dream of being an actress. The movies were big back then. But I've always really liked where I am in my life at the time. That's a very lucky thing. I loved being in college. I loved going to New Orleans for school. I've kind of liked every stage of my life,

and I didn't want to give that up.

Looking back, I think part of it was that I wasn't a very independent person. I probably just didn't want to go off by myself somewhere.

JE: How old were you then?

DSW: 15, 16.

JE: Your mother certainly wouldn't have let you go out there by yourself.

DSW: No, she went with me when we were there.

JE: Even if you had accepted the offer?

DSW: No, I'm sure she wouldn't have let me go alone.

JE: Isabel Ronan—was she a teacher at Tulsa Central?

DSW: She was a very famous speech teacher. I don't know if she ever actually taught at Central, but she taught Tony Randall and Paul Harvey.

I once had a conversation with Paul Harvey about her. He came to an event, and I got there early enough to interview him before anyone else arrived. He was such a funny, darling person. He said, "Did you actually take lessons from Isabel Ronan?" I said yes, and we compared notes and told funny stories about her. She was very interesting.

JE: I think he has credited her on his national broadcasts. I remember when he was coming to Tulsa for a Salvation Army event, I had him on the air, and he mentioned Tulsa Central and Isabel Ronan. That's why it stood out to me.

DSW: So maybe she did teach at Central. By the time I took lessons, she was teaching in her little house nearby.

JE: And Tony Randall—you said you even talked to him on the phone once?

DSW: Yes! I was taking a lesson from Isabel, and I guess she and Tony remained really good friends. He called during my lesson.

At the time, I was learning how to perform My Last Duchess. Isabel was teaching me intonations and where to pause. Then Tony Randall called,

and after speaking with him for a moment, she said, "I want you to talk to this young lady." So we talked for about 30 seconds—just a quick hello and pleasantries.

JE: "Are you learning from Isabel?"

DSW: Yeah.

JE: Oh yeah, that's fun.

Chapter 4 – 5:10

Long-time Friends

John Erling (JE): So at Tulsa Central, were you active in a lot of activities?

Danna Sue Walker (DSW): Medium, I'd say. The Daze a lot. I wasn't the main performer, but I was involved.

JE: When you say Daze?

DSW: Oh, D-A-Z-E. It was a big annual show that Central High School students put on. They sold tickets and raised some money from it. It was pretty well received—people thought it was more professional than what high school students usually did.

JE: So was it music? Acting?

DSW: It was a mix—acting, music, different little skits. You'd be invited to be in a tap dance group or perform short, funny sketches. Not really speeches, just quick, entertaining pieces. There were music skits, tap dancers, and comedy skits.

JE: So you were there in 1957 and 1958?

DSW: I graduated in 1959.

JE: Yeah, so those were your years there. Were there any classmates from Tulsa Central that people might know publicly?

DSW: Jim Woolsey.

JE: Jim Woolsey?

DSW: Head of the CIA—for a minute.

JE: Anybody else you can think of?

DSW: Arita—what was her name? She married David Gates, the singer from Bread.

JE: Yeah.

DSW: He even came back to Tulsa for something one time. Later on, after high school. She was a darling girl from Central, and he was from Will Rogers High School.

David Gates came to Central once when people knew that he and Arita were dating. He performed at a student assembly and sang to her.

JE: So he was already known back in '59 for his music?

DSW: Yeah, that's when he wrote Jo Baby. It was a really popular song at the time. He came from Will Rogers to Central to sing it to her during an assembly, and of course, we all just swooned.

JE: And her name was Rita?

DSW: Yes. The song was Jo Baby, and they're still married today.

JE: So then you graduate in 1959. What happens next?

DSW: Then I went to Sophie Newcomb College in New Orleans.

JE: Sophie Newcomb College in New Orleans—why did you choose that?

DSW: It was a Roxanna thing again. Roxanna and her mother and I went to New Orleans to see a piano concert by her father, Béla Rozsa. We got to spend the night in a dormitory at Sophie Newcomb, and I just fell in love with the whole situation—New Orleans, the atmosphere, everything.

So I decided to apply. I got accepted and went there, but really only for a year before coming back to TU.

JE: Now we have to go back to Roxanna because everyone knows her as Roxanna Lorton—married to Robert Lorton, who owned The Tulsa World at the time. You said her father was...?

DSW: Béla Rozsa.

JE: And Roxanna's maiden name was?

DSW: Rozsa—R-O-Z-S-A.

JE: Got it. And her father, Béla, played piano?

DSW: He was a concert pianist from Hungary. He did a lot of musical work before coming to TU, where he became a professor of advanced music studies—scores, composition, all of that. He was a fascinating individual.

He lived in Tulsa, in the Swan Lake area. I think that's how Roxanna and I met—because we lived close to each other.

JE: So you met Roxanna because you lived nearby?

DSW: Yes. One day, my front doorbell rang—we were in fifth grade. I opened the door, and there was this little girl with long dark braids, on roller skates. She said, "My best friend used to live in this house, but she had to move. So now you have to be my best friend."

And I said, "OK."

And here we are, all these years later—what, 75 years? We're still best friends. Isn't that the best thing ever?

JE: That's wonderful. And when you two get together, I bet you have a lot of fun sharing memories.

DSW: Yes, we do.

Chapter 5 – 7:00
Journalism

John Erling (JE): When you were at Sophie Newcomb College, were you getting homesick, or did you just feel like you needed to be back in Tulsa?

Danna Sue Walker (DSW): I think I was always homesick. I loved the experience. I loved being in New Orleans. But I think I was just homesick.

JE: Did Roxanna go to Tulsa Central with you? You were the same age, so the two of you were buddies in high school. Did she go on to college?

DSW: She went on to TU.

JE: OK, so then you were there together. Oh, I see—you came home because your best friend was at TU, and you wanted to be with her.

Your experience at Tulsa University—did your interests and classes start to develop there?

DSW: Yes—journalism. Do you remember Ed Dumont? He actually asked me to do some radio work with him once. I was going to, but I ended up not doing it, and I regret that. I loved him, and I thought it would have been fascinating.

But at that age, I don't know how far ahead we think. I was just enjoying everything I was doing, and I guess I didn't think I had time to learn something new.

JE: People still hear his voice today on KWGS—the IDs, as we call them, when he says, "KWGS." I can't even say it the way he did. I interviewed Ed for our Voices of Oklahoma oral history project—what a dear man, a wonderful human being.

DSW: Yeah, he was a good man.

JE: So you didn't do radio, but you jumped right into journalism. Where did that interest come from?

DSW: I started writing stories and little short pieces in grade school. I was terrible at math—I never got it—but language always came easy to me. So

I think I just naturally fell into it.

I took headline writing classes. Tom Wood was one of my professors—he eventually moved into journalism. I loved my professors, I loved the freedom of college compared to high school. It was more unstructured, more casual, and I liked that.

I also liked the way people in journalism thought—the creativity, the unexpected ideas. You never knew what they were going to say, and that made for fascinating conversations.

JE: Since you were writing at a young age, were you also a big reader?

DSW: Yes, constantly. My mother started reading to me before I started school. I think we started with Nancy Drew mysteries.

She always remembered this so well, and because she did, I feel like I remember it too. She would say, "Honey, I can't read anymore—my voice is giving out." And I would say, "Show me, show me! I want to finish it!" That's how I learned to read before I even started school.

JE: What a gift that was.

DSW: And I've never stopped reading.

JE: That's marvelous. These days, when we promote reading, we encourage parents to do that. But now, with so many literacy programs, children struggling to read is a major concern.

So, you graduated with what degree?

DSW: Journalism, with a minor in speech.

JE: Because you liked to perform?

DSW: Yes. I was always the one who raised my hand—"I guess I'll stand up in front of the class and read the poem!"

JE: What year did you graduate?

DSW: 1963.

JE: So then, were you set on working for a newspaper? What did you do next?

DSW: I was already working there.

JE: When you say "there," you mean The Tulsa World?

DSW: Yes. I started with small jobs, like counting puzzle pieces—probably early in college. I don't even remember exactly, just small tasks to help out.

Then I was hired to do the bridal column—arranging which brides would be featured on the cover, coordinating the photos, and writing up their stories. It wasn't deep journalism, just "Who was married to whom," but it was my start.

Julie Blakely, who wrote the People and Places column, and I became friends. I worked for her one summer before I officially started at the paper. One day, she told me, "You should take this over when I retire." That sounded great to me, so we started working me into the column.

For a while, it was People and Places by Julie Blakely and Danna Sue Grimes. Then, when she retired, my name just slid in.

JE: I like hearing about beginnings. Did you pursue The Tulsa World while you were at TU, or did they come looking for you?

DSW: I didn't pursue them.

Of course, I knew Roxanna and Bob by then. They met and married toward the end of our time at TU.

JE: And Bob was already with the newspaper, since his father owned it at the time.

DSW: Yes. We would talk about it, and I think we'd say, "Someday, do you want to do that?"—just casual conversations.

After I graduated, I worked for the Junior Chamber of Commerce, doing ad work for a while. Their office was in a building on 18th Street. Then it just evolved—"Why don't you come work here?" Julie was ready to step back, and I loved it, so that's what I did.

JE: When you trace it back to that day Roxanna knocked on your door, it all just fell into place. She didn't know she'd marry into a newspaper family, and then, naturally, you ended up working there too.

DSW: It was just so easy.

JE: That's a great story.

Chapter 6 – 4:50

Sewer Music

John Erling (JE): And then you helped Troy Gordon?

Danna Sue Walker (DSW): Oh, that's probably what I was trying to remember earlier. I helped Troy—he was doing some kind of football scoring contest. That was it. I helped him with that and just fell madly in love with him—oh my! And his wife—such darling people.

JE: Tell our audience who Troy Gordon was.

DSW: Troy Gordon was a writer for The Tulsa World. He had his own column—I think it was called Round the Clock, maybe. Just general chit-chat, nothing too serious, but he covered everything. He was such an easygoing, darling person.

JE: And his wife?

DSW: Joanne.

JE: She wrote too?

DSW: Yes.

JE: Did she write the same column?

DSW: No, hers was different. I think it was a little breezier in style. It's been so long ago, but she was really, really darling. She was actually responsible for me having a pigtail in Time magazine.

JE: All right, tell us about that.

DSW: Back then, in that era, there were these large storm drains near the Arkansas River. They weren't sewage drains—just rainwater runoff. Kids who liked to play guitar and make music started hanging out in those tunnels when their parents didn't want them practicing at home.

It almost became like a little underground culture. We would go in, light candles, and walk down deeper inside. People would sit against the walls while a little stream of water flowed through. Candles would float down, and people would play music.

Joanne thought it was the most fascinating thing. She wanted to do a story for Time magazine, so she came down, took some photos, and said, "Well, your pigtail made it in the picture!" Because at the time, I always wore my hair in little braids. So that was my claim to fame—my pigtail in Time magazine! I'll never make Time again.

JE: And how old were you then?

DSW: I think I was actually married by then. It must have been around 1965, maybe 1966.

JE: People would hear music coming from the sewers and wonder what in the world was going on.

DSW: Exactly!

JE: Do you still have that Time magazine?

DSW: I don't think so. I've moved too many times since then.

JE: So when did you start writing the People and Places column?

DSW: We started talking about it on my 40th birthday, and probably within the next month, I started.

JE: That would have been around what year?

DSW: 1981.

JE: And how many years did you write the column?

DSW: I think past 65, so probably almost 25 years. And if you count the years I worked earlier, it might add up to even longer.

JE: Didn't you meet your husband at The Tulsa World?

DSW: Yes! He was a photographer there. His name was Johnny Walker.

JE: Did he ever saddle up to the bar and say, "I want a drink with my name on it"?

DSW: I'm sure he must have!

JE: So Johnny passed away when?

DSW: When my children were grown. Everything was going great in my life, and then, about ten years after he passed, along came Steve Wolf, who I'm married to today.

JE: That's wonderful. How many children did you have with Johnny?

DSW: A boy and two girls—Stephanie and Amy.

But now, with Steve, we have a combined family of 15 grandchildren and 4 great-grandchildren!

JE: That's amazing. And Johnny—he was the chief photographer for The Tulsa World?

DSW: Yes, and also an attorney. He did both.

JE: Oh wow.

DSW: He even had an office for his law practice. Then he would zoom over to the paper and run the photography department. I think he introduced color photography to The Tulsa World.

JE: And he passed away in 2001, correct?

DSW: Yes.

Chapter 7 – 7:45

People and Places

John Erling (JE): Let's talk about the column now.

Danna Sue Walker (DSW): OK.

JE: And the scope of the column—what was it?

DSW: The scope of the column was all the things that were going on in Tulsa, particularly to raise money for various organizations. The goal was to shine a light on those organizations, probably to encourage people to realize that they're there and that they have value, and to acknowledge the people that were responsible for doing it all.

All those people worked so hard, gave so much money. If they didn't give money, they worked really hard, and I just thought everybody ought to have their name in the paper if they would like to have it. And I felt like I got to know the best of people in Tulsa because they were smart, or they couldn't have done what they do. They were generous, they were very active. I just felt privileged to get to be their friends.

JE: Do you recall some of the foundations that you wrote about?

DSW: The Salvation Army, because they had all those wonderful speakers. One of the best parts of my job was getting to sit next to the people that came to either speak or in any kind of way. So I got to have conversations with just the best people—not only famous, but worthwhile in what they were doing. I thought that was the best part.

JE: Salvation Army—any other foundations?

DSW: Oh gosh, just everything.

JE: Definitely the Henry Zarrow Foundation.

DSW: What a lovely, lovely man.

JE: Right. Yeah, we have his interview on Voices of Oklahoma. What about the Helmerich Foundation?

DSW: Yeah, they were huge. Anyway, Tulsa is rich in all of these things.

JE: I kind of think that Tulsa—not that we're always competing with Oklahoma City—but I think we would be known as the foundation city.

DSW: I think so.

JE: I just don't sense that they have it the way we have it here.

DSW: I don't think they do. I mean, not that I have personal knowledge particularly, but. And it isn't so much anymore because the press changes, what people want to read about changes.

JE: But the change—yes, it went away.

DSW: Yeah.

JE: Right. But the foundations are still doing their work today. I read some of your columns and noticed how you would name as many people attending the function, and of course, those involved with the event. So getting all those names had to be a chore—or was it a labor of love for you? Talk to us about making sure their names got in there.

DSW: Well, making sure their names got in there—I guess I probably would have a list of the chairman. And Margaret, if I was covering a library event, I would have her name on the list.

But through the years, I got to know all those people. So I would mainly try to make sure if I talked to somebody that I for sure mentioned them. I think I did it more that way.

I mean, I'm sure I would always be sure to include the chairman and the main workers or the main donors. And then, mostly the people that I would talk to. And depending on how much space I had on that day, I would try to include things they knew about me—like a little squib of something interesting that had happened because of that organization. Something along those lines.

JE: Those little squibs were interesting to people, I'm quite certain. We like those—we call them nuggets.

But I read one column where—I mean, there were about 15 names you had in there.

DSW: Oh, I'm sure, yeah.

JE: Did anybody get mad if their name wasn't mentioned?

DSW: Occasionally.

JE: Is that right?

DSW: Yeah.

JE: They would call?

DSW: Uh-huh, occasionally.

JE: And you just had to say, "I'm sorry?"

DSW: I'd just say, "Oh my gosh, next time, be sure and say hi," and blah, blah, blah. I tried not to apologize all the time, but I would try to make it so that next time, we'd work it out.

JE: Yeah. Why did you try not to apologize?

DSW: I guess I just didn't want to be in that position.

JE: Maybe that could get old.

DSW: Yeah.

JE: But actually, people were super, super kind.

DSW: For the most part.

JE: Yeah, super kind to you.

DSW: Yeah.

JE: Any column or columns that stand out to you in terms of getting reactions?

DSW: People would say that once my column was in the paper, they would get tons more reservations. I mean, it would draw attention.

I found—this is funny—yesterday, I was cleaning out a drawer, and I found an old thank-you note from Kathy Audley, who used to be in charge of the library. It was about a dinner—not Margaret's dinner, but a dinner from 20 years ago—and Eudora Welty had been the speaker.

I am never going to let this note go again because I didn't even know I had kept it. Anyway, Kathy wrote something like, "Danna, you are terrific. This article is superb. It is so much better than the news story side—you

captured so much more of it."

Just sweet, lovely, flattering things. And I thought, "Oh, I am so glad that I still have this note," because that would have meant a lot to me. I remember Kathy—she was the director of the library.

JE: I guess.

DSW: Kathy Audley, I think, was her name.

JE: But you mentioned Eudora Welty.

DSW: Eudora Welty was the author who came to speak. She was a Southern writer—an old Southern writer—very well known.

As I said, one of the best things has been meeting all those people that spoke at the library.

JE: Peggy Helmerich Dinner?

DSW: Yeah.

JE: Once a year, when they bring in...

DSW: Distinguished author dinner.

JE: Right. Were they doing that when you were writing?

DSW: Yes.

JE: OK.

DSW: I have a whole long list of people that I wrote about. John le Carré came—his real name was David Cornwell—and he was so charming. We all had a big crush on him.

JE: It must have made you feel good when you were doing that column—all the good you were doing.

DSW: I loved it. In fact, soon before I retired, I remember quoting—I won't get this quote exactly right—but Katharine Graham from The Washington Post said something like, "If you can do what you love and feel that it is doing good, what could be more fun?"

JE: No question about it.

DSW: So I used that quote a lot.

JE: Oh yes, yes, yes. But about thank-you notes—did you get many?

DSW: A lot. Just wonderful ones.

JE: And those have been lost?

DSW: Yeah. Every once in a while, I'll come across one. People were so sweet—kind, thoughtful.

Chapter 8 – 6:07

Tulsa Tribune

John Erling (JE): Don't you have some memories of stars that you met, like the opera star Beverly Sills?

Danna Sue Walker (DSW): Oh yes, what a darling woman. It's really good to get to places early because sometimes you get to have a certain interaction that you wouldn't have otherwise.

I got to the hotel, and Beverly Sills was just getting there. She had not gone up to her room yet, and she said, "Well, come on, just come with me." So we went up to her room, she took her shoes off, and she said, "My feet are killing me."

She also said, "I have lost all my makeup." So she said, "On the way here, I had them stop by Walgreens, and I went in and bought all the makeup I could, and this is it, this is it!"

Anybody that you meet—I'm sure with all the people you have interviewed—when you get an authentic nugget of how they really are, I just think it's so rewarding.

JE: Right. So then you wrote a story about her, obviously. That was within People and Places?

DSW: Yeah.

JE: So you could still write a column just on a person at you met?

DSW: Well, I was writing. I'm sure I also wrote about what she said during her speech and who was there and who the chairman was. It's always more fun if you can throw in stuff. Because names, honestly, even if it's, you know, kind of not that exciting after a while...

JE: Who were some of the people you worked with at The Tulsa World? We can take you back to '62 to maybe '86. Tell us some of the people you worked with at the paper.

DSW: I mean, of course, Julie Blakely was the major player. Nellie Ladner was a big writer then. Rusty Lang was the head of my section for a while. Joe Worley came on board—fabulous. I mean, what a lovely, darling, sweet man.

JE: He became editor, didn't he?

DSW: Yeah, yeah.

JE: Before him, Sid Steen was the editor forever.

DSW: Yes, and again, I think that—well, I've said I like people who have that way they work, the philosophy that they tell you, "No, that wasn't very good," but they never make you feel weird. Most of the time, they make you feel like you're smarter than you are, and all the good stuff.

JE: Some of the time you were there, you had competition at The Tulsa Tribune, didn't you?

DSW: Yes. If a really good friend could be competition—Ella Krewson. She wrote a column similar to People and Places in The Tribune.

I loved having The Tribune. It was a really nice situation. I think it made both papers better.

Her name was Ella Krewson. Her husband was Judge Tom Krewson, who has passed away. I think he might have been head of the juvenile thing for a while. We used to go on ski trips with them all the time. Anyway, so that was a competitor.

I used to actually go up and talk to Jenkin "Jenks" Jones a lot—not about my work because I didn't work for him—but just because he was, you know, interesting, fabulous. I would like to go up and say hi, and we'd always get into some philosophical something or other.

JE: That was Jenks Jones?

DSW: Yeah.

JE: And we should point out—you were all in the same building.

DSW: Yes.

JE: Right, that's why it was easy for you to do that.

DSW: Yes.

JE: Ella Krewson and you—could you be at the same event?

DSW: Oh yeah, we would be.

JE: And were you interested in how she wrote about it?

DSW: Oh, I'm sure I would look and see what she did.

JE: But, of course, you would have both already gone to press before you had the opportunity to see it?

DSW: Right.

JE: But once it was printed?

DSW: Yeah, then of course, I'd think, "Oh, I love that word she used—dang, why didn't I think of that?"

JE: And for some of those foundations, they got a double whammy then, didn't they?

DSW: Yes, an evening mention in both papers.

JE: There are some of us who still miss The Tulsa Tribune on our driveway.

DSW: I do, right?

JE: You had deadlines you had to meet, didn't you? So if you were at an evening event, when did your column have to be in?

DSW: Sometimes I had to go back to the paper and write it if it was that important to get it in the next day. So I'd have to go back to the paper at 9 or 10 and write it for the next day.

Generally, that did not happen. Generally, I would have the next day to do it.

I am a person who likes to get things done before the deadline because I don't like deadlines. I'd rather be two hours early and not even think about it.

Actually, I still do that now, which drives my husband insane.

JE: You do what?

DSW: Just want to be ready sooner. Get there sooner. Don't be late.

JE: Right. Largely, then, you didn't have to meet overnight deadlines. You could cover an evening event and write it the next day?

DSW: Right.

I remember one time I covered something at Gilcrease, and I told the main speaker, "I am going to have to go, so what do you want me to include even though I'm not listening to your speech?"

And he said, "I'll back you up whatever you say. You know what I'm going to say—time and treasure."

So I just quoted a few things, which he probably said anyway.

JE: Well, you got to know people you would never have met because of People and Places.

DSW: Exactly. That was just wonderful.

JE: Maybe you became friends with some of these foundation people?

DSW: Oh gosh, yeah, because some of them I had even met earlier in life. Mother and Daddy were friends with a lot of people.

JE: Yeah. And as you said earlier, you were around those country club people when you were very, very young. And then, as you grew older, they still remembered you.

DSW: Yes.

Chapter 9 – 8:40

Junior League of Tulsa

John Erling (JE): Since I'm doing oral history and I'm a big fan of oral history, I discovered that you participated in the oral history project for the Junior League of Tulsa. How did that come about? Do you know? Maybe you don't know why they did it, but they came to you to be one of the interviewers.

Danna Sue Walker (DSW): I am assuming it was because I was a member then. In the early days of that membership, you had certain jobs—I wouldn't call it a job, but projects that it would be good for you to be in because they were trying to get you to be throughout the community in whatever role you might have. So I'm imagining that's how it came about.

JE: So you took that on, and because you had a curious mind and you were interviewing people anyway, I suppose that's one of the reasons they selected you. I went through the lists—I don't have the whole list here—but one of them was Walter Biskup, a longtime reporter and editor for The Tulsa World. Anything significant about talking to him?

DSW: Of course, I absolutely loved him—a gruff, curmudgeonly, wonderful guy. I think he was the one who looked like a notorious machine gun killer guy.

JE: Machine Gun Kelly?

DSW: Oh, see, I'm not going to know, but he looked very similar to that human being, and he was mistaken for him sometimes. He even got to know the girlfriend of this particular gangster. This was back in the gangster days. Walter took me to lunch one day and said, "Up those stairs is where I met the girlfriend of so-and-so." He had funny stories to tell about being in

other places and people avoiding him because they thought he was this gangster.

JE: Some of the other names that jumped out to me—Melvina Stevenson?

DSW: Yes, I loved Melvina. I did know her real well.

JE: She was a Tulsa World editor or writer, but she moved to Washington?

DSW: Yes, and she was a big writer in Washington too.

JE: Writing about...?

DSW: About the Washington scene, I think.

JE: The social scene there?

DSW: Yeah, I believe so because I even went there to see her one time—just for the afternoon or something. I saw her in Washington.

JE: And in the interview you did with her, she talked about her early days as a female reporter?

DSW: Right.

JE: Did you face any issues as a female reporter?

DSW: No, particularly not in the area that I was in.

JE: But you remember Bob Forsman?

DSW: Oh yeah. He was with The Tribune, I think?

JE: Okay. He talked about important news stories of the '30s and '40s, discussing a murder case and criminals in Tulsa.

DSW: How interesting.

JE: Right, right. But I skipped over Louis Meyer, and I shouldn't have because if he was here, he'd call me on it. You interviewed Louis B. Meyer—tell us who he was.

DSW: He was a local bookstore owner. And I always thought of a kind of a philosopher—very quiet, very soft-spoken. Fun to talk to. Always had a lot of

books he wanted to share, and because I kind of knew him outside of his bookstore—although I don't exactly remember why—he was just very kind.

JE: But he'd been on KVOO for many years, and actually, I could make sense out of it—maybe even a two-hour program on that radio station. So he became known publicly that way.

I had him on when I was at KRMG for a long time, and he was very engaging and very interesting.

I would imagine, you know, the newspaper business has changed so much. Today, they wouldn't have time for People and Places columns, would they?

DSW: I don't think so.

JE: Or space?

DSW: Or space, yeah.

JE: Yeah, we've lost a lot of that. Why have we?

DSW: Print media—it hasn't disappeared, but it's kind of fading, I think.

JE: It seems to be fading.

DSW: There's just so much more immediacy on all news. Everybody gets their news on TV, radio still, thank goodness, online.

I have met people who have never even looked at a newspaper. They're usually younger, of course. They don't take it, they don't even think about it. They get it online.

I met a woman one time—she was an engineer, and I thought, "Gosh, she is going to be so interesting because I bet she's really, really smart."

Someone had just finished talking about how they took The Wall Street Journal and several different papers. So I said to her, "How do you get your news?"

And she said, "On Facebook."

I mean, I didn't say anything, but in my mind, I thought, "Oh, OK."

JE: Yeah, and readership has gone down for newspapers. Many have folded across the country—it's sad. But I want you to know that I'm someone who has to have the paper in my hand.

DSW: Me too.

JE: I read The Tulsa World, and I get The New York Times in my hand.

DSW: Exactly, me too.

My husband and I have our coffee and the newspaper, and that is the serendipity of how the whole day begins.

We can discuss back and forth, argue about what we think—

JE: I'm with you, I'm with you.

We just have to have that. Because I think people who read The Tulsa World online don't get the full flavor.

DSW: Oh, they don't.

JE: You can easily miss a story. I know they electronically send it to you, but it just doesn't jump out the same way.

However, papers are forced to do that—it's a revenue generator for them. People buy the digital version or buy both.

Did you have editors who would look at your copy when you sent it in—people who would proof it or say, "I think you should change this or that?"

DSW: Yes. We had, you know, the head of whatever department—like I was in the women's department, so we had an editor and she would do it.

Sometimes, one of the other editors out in the rest of the newsroom would look at it as well, but not as often.

One time, I was called down because they said, "Well, you said that Betsy Horowitz gave a Christmas party, and that's wrong."

And I said, "No, it's not, because she invited me and she had a Christmas party!"

But they wouldn't really want to change it around or use different words. They would want to help me—it's how I looked at it. Like, "Oh no, that would be a bad mistake—don't do that."

So sometimes, they were right. Of course, most of the time, I was right.

JE: Of course you were. Did it feel funny sometimes? When you felt you were really right, and they said "No, you should write it this way?" Did you have to give in to their assessment?

DSW: It didn't happen very often. But surely that must be, but I don't know that I ever lost. I think I could have. I wish I had a more vivid recollection of all the things you're asking me, because I would love to know myself.

JE: After it went to print, and somebody read it in the paper, did anyone ever come to you and say, "You shouldn't have done this or that?"

DSW: People would call and say, "You shouldn't have given them that space—they're not a good person." And I would say, "Well, you wouldn't want me to be the judge of who is the right person to be quoted."

I said, "You wouldn't want that. That would be bad. Just let everybody do their thing, and the chips fall where they may."

JE: So they did call and say that?

DSW: Two or three times, I can remember.

JE: Yeah.

Chapter 10 – 6:00
Journalism Advice

John Erling (JE): Somebody starting in journalism today—what skills do you think are really most important?

Danna Sue Walker (DSW): Curiosity. Look at what you—if you have a field, learn every single thing about the field, and then that can be your expertise. Or don't have an expertise and just kind of know the field. People always want to be—Bernstein and—you know, that's how a lot of people wanted to be.

JE: Woodward and Bernstein?

DSW: Yeah. A lot of younger people said that was what inspired them. They would learn about Woodward and Bernstein, and they would think that they wanted to be a newspaper person. They wanted to find out stuff.

JE: They were investigative, and they popped the Watergate story.

DSW: Right, right.

JE: But they've got to follow what they really enjoy, right? Going back to Ms. Graham—what she said—you know, I think everybody thinks they're a writer because we do write. Some people think, "Because I can swing a golf club, I could be a golfer," but you can't.

DSW: But you just can't. Exactly.

JE: But you have to follow that, and you started writing when you were a child, so you had that in you. So if you told these people who want to be a writer, "You've really got to want to do it," right?

DSW: Because, see, I think journalism or newspaper writing is so much different than writing a novel. Because it's so immediate. I liked being able to relive what I thought was a fun time and talk about the people and talk about the event. That was pretty easy because it was immediate. Now, I have tried to think about writing a novel or anything like that, and I don't know that I can.

JE: It's a different feel, isn't it?

DSW: Yeah.

JE: Are there writers that you respected, kind of looked up to?

DSW: Newspaper writers and stuff?

JE: Or even novelists or books?

DSW: Oh, well, I mean, you know—all the Baldacci, you know, Patterson, all those guys.

JE: Newspaper writers?

DSW: Newspaper writers—I thought, uh, what was the sports writer? Bill Connors?

JE: Bill Connors, yes.

DSW: He was such a nifty guy, I thought, and I think he was just brilliant in sports writing. You know, I don't know if I ever picked out—except for him—because he was such a huge figure at The Tulsa World when I was there.

JE: He was a star. There's no question about that.

DSW: Yeah.

JE: And he was in with the Barry Switzers, and they all respected him. All the sports people respected him.

DSW: Yeah.

JE: In fact, The Tulsa World has been running some of his old columns.

DSW: I have read them.

JE: Isn't that something?

DSW: Yeah. I think it was the type of person he was, too. He was very calm. I don't remember him throwing fits. You know, every once in a while, a reporter will throw a fit.

JE: Nothing haughty about him at all.

DSW: No.

JE: Right. Maybe someday they'll rerun People and Places columns in The Tulsa World. You know, it actually would be interesting. Because older set—whatever—if they go back and see, "This was dated such and such." I just know that would be an interesting piece. We need to talk to them about that.

DSW: Yeah. I don't—yeah. I mean, you know, it's so dated now.

JE: No, no, it is. And that would be the very reason. Are you writing anything today? Do you write?

DSW: No. I have a granddaughter—she's really—she's trying to get someone to even look at this book. She started in high school writing books. Now she's married, has two children, and is an assistant DA in Tulsa. And she's tiny and brilliant. She has written several books, and she's trying to get an agent—somebody to even look at it. I think—I haven't, so far, been able to help her discover that because I've never done that.

JE: And what's her name?

DSW: Sarah Herrera.

JE: All right. And so she picked up writing from you?

DSW: Well, that's what she thinks.

She does storyboards and has all these ideas. The one she's working on now is sort of a mystery with a little magic thrown in.

Actually, she wrote it because, five years ago, she called and said, "You want to take a trip with me and go do some stuff?"

And I said, "Sure, where are we going?"

And she said, "We're going to Salem, Massachusetts, because I want to research witch stuff."

So we went, and this is woven into her book.

JE: Well, you have been a big inspiration for her—you know that.

DSW: I love that. I mean, everyone says, "Oh my gosh, Mini-Me." Yeah. It's great to have that relationship.

JE: Absolutely. So how would you like to be remembered?

DSW: I would like to be remembered as someone who could tell a good story, who was kind, who made people laugh and feel better.

JE: That's a great way to be remembered. And I would concur with that. So thank you for sharing.

DSW: You have made this easy.

JE: Yeah, yeah, that's what it's supposed to be—easy, easy. You made it easy for people yourself when you were writing.

DSW: Thank you.

JE: So again, thank you. I appreciate it.

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