

## Dick Schmitz

Generations of Tulsans recognize his legendary voice on the radio airwaves.

### Chapter 01 - 1:39

#### Introduction

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**Announcer:** Dick Schmitz was one of the original “Big 7 DJs” when rock and roll took Tulsa by storm in 1957. He was named Program Director in 1958. Under his leadership, and with him as the station’s morning man, KAKC dominated the ratings as Tulsa’s number one station for almost a decade.

During his tenure at KAKC, Dick’s special attention to the production of commercial copy soon led to his recognition as one of Tulsa’s top voice talents. In 1966, he left KAKC and joined another Tulsa radio station where his commercial production company, Irving Productions, was born.

To Dick Schmitz, commercial copy was more than just a bunch of words read into a microphone. It was good writing, interpretation of copy, complimenting sound effects or music, editing, appropriate voice talent, and a sense of pride in one’s effort.

Throughout his career, the University of Illinois graduate has unselfishly shared his extraordinary talents with local organizations and causes. Dick’s work has been recognized by the Tulsa Ad Club with their highest honor, the Silver Addy, in 1972; the EDDY award to Irving Productions in 1998; and the Ad Club’s Lifetime award in 2002. Other recognitions include the Tulsa Area United Way’s Honorary Life Member in 1997, the Tulsa Press Club Radio Icon Award in 2004, and the Oklahoma Association of Broadcasters Hall of Fame in 2005.

So now you can listen to a voice you may have heard before, but you didn’t realize you were listening to radio and advertising man Dick Schmitz. Here’s his oral history on [VoicesofOklahoma.com](http://VoicesofOklahoma.com).

**Chapter 02 - 9:27****Illinois**

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**John Erling:** My name is John Erling. Today's date is April 2, 2010.

Dick, if you will state your full name and your date of birth?

**Dick Schmitz:** Well, my name is John Richard Schmitz and I go by Dick, Dick Schmitz. And my date of birth is December of 1934. I was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

**JE:** And your age today?

**DS:** Seventy-five.

**JE:** We didn't pick this date, April 1, April Fool's Day, because of you but it just happened that way.

**DS:** Are you sure?

**JE:** Yes.

**DS:** Are you sure?

**JE:** Where are we recording this interview?

**DS:** The studios of our company, Irving Productions, here in Tulsa. We've been in business almost forty-five years, and, hopefully, we'll make it another day.

**JE:** What hospital were you born in?

**DS:** I don't know, unless it was Mercy. That's the only name I can remember. There was a Mercy Hospital in Tulsa, but I don't know if that was the hospital I was born in or not.

**JE:** All right. Your mother's maiden name and where she was raised?

**DS:** Her name is Juanita Alderson. She was born in Oklahoma, in Indian Territory. I do know where but I just can't remember.

**JE:** What—

**DS:** She grew up in Tulsa.

**JE:** Your father's name?

**DS:** Henry Schmitz. By the way, my mother graduated from Central High School in 1925. My dad graduated for Holy Family High School in 1925. He grew up here in Tulsa as well.

**JE:** So the whole family has been Tulsa background.

**DS:** There's a definite base here, yeah. And my grandparents lived here as well.

**JE:** Your father, what did he do for a living?

**DS:** He worked for the Texas Company, which is sort of a division of Texaco. He was in the pipeline division. He worked in the oil fields.

**JE:** You had brothers and sisters?

**DS:** I have two sisters, both younger than me. One is going to be seventy this year, next month; and the other one is sixty-four.

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

**DS:** Well, he worked as a gauger for the pipeline company. He would climb tank batteries, as they were known, and take samples of oil from the tanks to see what the quality was. He would measure it on different instruments that he carried up and down the tank. He would test the oil and if it was quality oil he would then go down to the bottom of the tank, open a valve, and send it through a pipeline to a refinery.

If it wasn't of that quality, he'd pass the word on to the people that put it in the tank and that was their problem.

**JE:** And your mother was the homemaker?

**DS:** Yep, that's it.

**JE:** Your memories of the neighborhood here in Tulsa, do you have any?

**DS:** Just very vaguely. We lived out on 5th Street near TU. The house is gone now. The street and the house are all part of the campus.

I can remember my folks and friends of theirs that would come over and visit. Keep in mind, I was not more than four years old at the time. But they would come over and visit and they would order Cokes to be delivered to the house at a nickel apiece. And so they would each order a Coke. So when they brought them the Cokes it cost them about a quarter or something like this to get five Cokes delivered to the house some time in the evening.

**JE:** How old were you when you moved to Illinois?

**DS:** I was probably about four, give or take a few months.

**JE:** Why was that move made to Illinois?

**DS:** Well, my dad was working for Texas Company, which was, as I said, a division of Texaco. They transferred him up there to work in the oil fields up there as a gauger.

**JE:** Where in Illinois were you living?

**DS:** We moved to Salem, Illinois, which is about sixty miles east southeast of St. Louis.

**JE:** So your first elementary school was there?

**DS:** Yes. For eight years, I went to Shanafelt Grade School. We had no kindergarten at the grade school at that time. This was about three miles out in the country. Although there were a number of students in the school, practically all of them were related to somebody that was in the oil business because it was right near the center of the oil boom that was going on in the Salem area, which was referred to as the Centralia Field, but it was really the Salem part of that field. I went eight years there.

Then I went into town, into Salem, and I went to high school, graduating in 1952.

**JE:** Was this kind of tough on your family, your parents? Was there a lot of back and forth to Tulsa, because they were really Tulsa people?

**DS:** No, it really wasn't. They were glad to do something new and it was a good job for my dad. Obviously with the way the oil was booming at that time, it looked like a long-term solid relationship. And he stayed with Texaco the entire time before he retired.

**JE:** While in the Salem Community High School, what were your activities? And talk to us about your experience there.

**DS:** Well, it was a lot of fun. I was in the band. They had a band during my senior year and decided they wanted to do a variety show. And as a result, they had different students go out and do certain acts. And I somehow latched onto watching a fella by the name of Victor Borge. I played a little piano and had a pretty good sense of humor, at least I thought I did, and other people said that, so I just did a total and complete imitation of Victor Borge's phonetic punctuation. And I even used a German accent. He was from Denmark and he had an accent, which was not terribly unlike a German accent. But I used this accent to do this phonetic punctuation. I—

**JE:** Do you remember some of that now?

**DS:** Well, strangely enough, every five years in Salem they have an all-school reunion. From year to year it's like just a class reunion. But that all-school reunion is coming up in October of this year. And I got a call last week, asking me if I would do the phonetic punctuation routine again because people there still remember it. And this was back in 1952 that I did it. I sort of tried to beg off of the thing but they just really got after me. And I'd done it once before at the very first reunion they had for all-school, and that was back in 1990. So here's the latest version of that coming up and there won't be another one for five years, and maybe they'll forget about it by then. But I finally agreed to do it.

But you know what I think I'm going to do? I think I'm going to ask them, "Who is one of the better, most adaptable students in the school?" And I want to bring that student on stage with me, one of the current of the attendee at Salem Community High School, and ask them to read the piece that I read. Which has all this punctuation in it, which Victor Borge wrote and originated and it's all his. I probably could have been sued for this when I was doing it. And I may get sued anyway.

But anyway, the point is, I'm thinking about having them come up and read it and then I would fill in the punctuation with the sound effects and see how long he can go or she can go without coming apart. Because it is a pretty funny piece and it was written that way. And it's the kind of thing where, Putt [making strange noises], I can't even do it here. Putt [strange sound], that's a period, that's not a good one because I'm in the process of talking. But you've got to be in the right mood to Ack [strange sound], that's a comma, you know. Phfft Putt [strange sounds] that's an exclamation mark. Kaarit [sounds sort of like a cat howl], that's a question mark.

So you put those things into this format that he wrote, like the very first line is: "Through the open window there suddenly came light, Putt. Poor Eleanor sat alone dreaming of but one more thing, Putt."

Anyway, it went on from there. I won't go any further, I can't, I don't remember any more. [laughing] But I've got it written down someplace.

**JE:** Oh, Victor Borge was extremely funny, and yes, using the piano as his prop, I would assume.

**DS:** And I had enough piano that I could do some funny things there, a little thing called a Mozart Opera, which Borge also did. But not always did we have a piano, so most of the time I had to rely on just the reading itself.

**JE:** Well, while in high school you became interested in radio, at that point? Is that how it happened?

**DS:** Yeah, that was sort of an accident, in a way. I was in a history class my junior year, there was a little local radio station out of Centralia, Salem didn't have a station at that time, and the local Centralia station had a program where they would go around to different schools throughout the whole southern Illinois area. They would put together a fifteen-minute program and they would have the principal speak for about a minute. They would have the band play a couple of songs, maybe lead-in, come-out, and so forth. They would have some talented person that might play the piano or clarinet or something, do a little solo. And they also would try to do something serious with regard to academics, and this happened to be a debate.

So they picked two students from each of two history classes. And I wasn't particularly great in history, but I was one of the ones selected. They had two boys, two girls. Then they brought us out and they had two on one side, two on the other. And said, "Okay, we're going to have this little mock debate. Here's your question: 'Should Red China be admitted to the United Nations?'"

I don't even remember what side I was on because I had no clue what they were talking about. Nonetheless, I read up on it a little bit. They even gave me the answers. I didn't really want to read it so I tried to memorize it and then modify it a little bit.

So when the guy that was conducting the debate said, "Now how do you feel about this?"

"Well, we're in favor of it."

And the other side was against it. Each of them had been given or two lines to read as specific reasoning for or against, and that's what I did. They put the program together, they put it on the air, and then they broadcast it over the whole PA system in the school, probably a couple of weeks later.

Then teachers and fellow students started saying, "Hey, good voice. You ought to think about going on the radio or something like that."

I'd never really thought about it. All along I was thinking maybe I'd get into teaching or something. But as it turned out, I thought, "Well, that's sort of intriguing, that's sort of interesting. I sort of like that."

**JE:** So you had no thoughts of radio prior to that time?

**DS:** No, not really, no, no. And I hadn't done my Victor Borge bit either, on the variety show. I hadn't really stood up to do something like that until really the next year, my senior year. So all things just seemed to be flowing.

Then I wanted to go to the University of Illinois but I couldn't afford it. But I did get a chance to go to Southern Illinois University, and that was where I went to after I left high school.

## Chapter 03 - 7:32

### First Radio Job

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**John Erling:** When did you get your first job in radio?

**Dick Schmitz:** The summer of '54. I had applied there the year before in '53, because I'd been working in the oil fields as a roustabout, or a roughneck, they were called, I think that time. Either roustabout or roughneck. I'd been working for Texaco, my dad had helped me get a job there. I'd done that one summer and I wanted to get out of that.

I tried to get a job out at the station out in Fairfield where my folks had moved a couple of years before, but I didn't go to high school there, I was already in college. But it was between my sophomore and junior year and I went out and applied again. And it just happened that somebody had left, a part-timer had left.

This fella named Tom Land, he said, "Yeah, we'll give you a try, we like your voice, we'll give you a try."

So I went out and auditioned some more and he gave me the job. And it happened in the summer of 1954, that was my first job at WFIW in Fairfield, Illinois.

**JE:** What did you do?

**DS:** Well, I just did what everybody else didn't want to do, basically. I worked Sunday mornings, I worked late in the evening. One of the best lessons I ever got was when I had not prepared myself to do a sportscast on a Sunday afternoon with all the football scores, and so forth that were coming in off the wire, and that's the only access you had—just rip and read. So I thought about the time that maybe I should work a little harder on this.

And after I had done this horrendous sportscast, and, I mean, I can't even begin to describe it to you, John. I just got through with that and then I put it back on to playing some music or something and I was just beside myself thinking how bad this was.

The next morning I walked into the station fairly early. I was supposed to help out on a noon shift at that time on a Monday morning, and Tom Land, the owner, said, "Hey, can you come in my office a minute? I want to talk to you."

I said, "Oh boy, here we go."

And I did go into his office, and he sat me down, and he said, "You know, I heard your sportscast yesterday afternoon. That was probably the worst piece of sportscast that I've ever, ever experienced in my life. And I'm just hanging my head." And he said, "But you know, we've all done that." And he said, "Don't do it again." He said, "You're better than that. All you got to do is just remember that you have a commitment to your audience to deliver the best you can."

I tried to remember that and that put a lesson in my head that I've never forgotten. I'll always be grateful to Tom because that's just exactly the way he handled it. I didn't get screamed at, I didn't get hollered at, I didn't get berated, and the saving grace was, "You know, we've all done that."

**JE:** Yeah. You attended Southern Illinois University but did your university work go beyond that school?

**DS:** Yeah, I had gotten involved in some extracurricular activities down there. I was sort of in charge of Freshmen Week my sophomore year and cochairman of that with a girl named Bernice Guntler and we put something together for the freshmen.

Then I got involved in some other variety shows down there. The big show of the year was called the Theta Xi Variety Show.

Another fellow, a fellow by the name of Paul Morris, and I became really close friends. He was a funny guy and he was a couple of years older than me. And he was a senior when I was a sophomore, but we had a great time doing things together. And as a result, I was telling him, "You know, we ought to enter that Theta Xi Variety Show."

And he said, "What would we do?"

And I said, "Well, I could play the piano and you could sing and we could come up with some funny bits." And so we did this thing, we made up this act and we entered that show.

Now you want to know who else was entered in that program at the same time? Dick Gregory. Dick Gregory was a big track star at Southern Illinois University. He held for many years several track records at SIU. But Dick Gregory was in this thing. I didn't know he was going to be in it until Paul and I entered the competition in what was called the individual acts. There was group acts, which was five or more, and individual acts, which was under five. So Paul and I entered this thing, and we won that show. There was competition and there was a trophy and we won that darn show.

So then later, when they had another variety show up in Salem, where I had started doing this kind of stuff, they asked us to come up and do our award-winning act from

Southern Illinois University. So Paul and I drove up to Salem and did the thing on that variety show up there in the high school.

But this thing with the Theta Xi was just a hoot and we won the darn thing based on the judges and the applause from the audience, and so forth. Then we were in an auditorium called Shryock Auditorium, which is still there.

As a matter of fact, I was up there last August to the campus and just walked around. I couldn't believe the campus but it's still there. They still use it as a performance center. It was just a lot of fun; saw a lot of great shows in there.

**JE:** So you worked the local radio station?

**DS:** I did not work in a local station in Carbondale, that's where SIU was at the time.

For your information, when I was there, the first year there were twenty-eight hundred students on the campus, and the second year there were like thirty-three hundred students. And ten years later, what I was told was there is somewhere over twenty thousand, and the center of the campus had moved a mile away. That's how fast it grew and how big it became.

But no, I didn't work there, and the thing about it was, as I said, I'd always wanted to go to the University of Illinois but my folks just couldn't afford it and I didn't have a good enough job to sustain myself. Although, comparing the expense of going to the U of I then to now would be a joke. But I got a scholarship offer. And I don't know exactly what it was based on. It may have been my extracurricular activity and partially on grades, which weren't great but they were okay. And I got this scholarship offer to the University of Illinois.

So I took it and went up there and I just couldn't believe it when I got there. I'd been up there to visit the campus before I decided to go to SIU and it was just wonderful. I just had a great, great time there.

**JE:** But there you worked for the university TV station?

**DS:** When they signed that station on the air I was one of the original three cameramen, when the station WILL TV signed on the air. I was also taking television courses in production, direction, and so forth. Didn't know whether I was going to get into radio or television.

I hadn't been able to get a radio job. I'd applied at every station in Champaign or Banner. It's a twin city thing and there were probably four different radio stations and I really couldn't get anybody to talk to me. I even applied at the university station, WILL, and I couldn't even get an audition at any of these places except WDWS. And this guy let me come in and read some stuff and then I walked away. And it's like, "Don't call us, we'll call you."

Then I got the job at the TV station and I took it, and met two of my very best friends, one of whom lives here in Tulsa now, Don Lanier; and the other was Edward Yallowitz, who has passed away but he was a great ad man for J. Walter Thompson for many years.



The three of us were the three cameramen when we signed that station on the air. It was a great opportunity, but then, wouldn't you believe it, about six months later, I got this call from WDWS, asked if I'd like to come out and read again, audition, because they had an opening for a part-timer. I said, "Sure."

So I went out there. They offered me a part-time job working mornings, and then working at noontime, and then sometimes on weekends at night while they were covering basketball games. So I simply said, "I'll take it."

So I actually had two part-time jobs I was working at while finishing up school. My senior year, my day started about five thirty in the morning and ended when I went to bed, probably about eleven thirty. It was crazy, for about a year and a half it was that way. That's how I got on to WDWS.

And wouldn't you know? The week after I told WDWS I would take the job, WILL radio called and wanted to know if I wanted to come over and they had an opening. And I said, "I don't think so."

## Chapter 04 - 4:28

### Dick Meets Alma

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**John Erling:** I ask this question because it's Illinois—had Paul Harvey made his major impact on broadcasting at that time, so you were very aware of him?

**Dick Schmitz:** I have to tell you that until I moved back to Tulsa I never was aware of Paul Harvey.

**JE:** So you didn't listen to Chicago stations?

**DS:** Occasionally, yeah.

**JE:** Okay.

**DS:** WGN came in down there fairly well.

**JE:** Yeah.

**DS:** But I don't know what station Paul was even on, he may have been on GN.

**JE:** Somewhere along in here, is it true that you married somebody?

**DS:** Yeah. In January of '56, Alma and I got married. There's a little, tiny, quick story I can tell you about that. We had met in high school. We went to Salem High School together. So when we got out of school, I went to Southern Illinois University, she went out to Washington to work in the Pentagon for the army. She took civil service tests and training, and so forth, and went out there.

I sort of thought maybe that was going to be the end of it and I think she did too. But we kept writing back and forth, couldn't afford a phone call, but we would write back and forth, letters about every week. She just kept in touch. And when she'd come back to Salem to visit I would go up there and make sure we got together and we just kept communicating back and forth.

Our first date was actually in January of 1950, at a basketball game. We were both in the band so all we did was just when we weren't playing, we sat together. And that was our idea of a date.

And she brought some lousy cookies that her mother had made. I never saw those again. But anyway, the game was incidental. So that's where we had our first date. And we had several more after that.

I didn't even drive at that time, my mama had to take me into town to go to a movie on a Sunday afternoon and we'd go by and pick up Alma and we'd go to the movie.

Then she went away and we both agreed to see other people, and we did some of that during that time period. But we still kept in touch.

And finally, it got down to the point where I got this offer to go to the University of Illinois. And in the meantime, about a year after she went to work at the Pentagon, for the army, she was not happy there. Because all she was doing was typing orders and typing orders, and using carbon paper with about ten copies. And she hated it.

So she was talking to her sister, who she was living with in Washington. Her sister worked for the navy and loved her job. And she said, "Well, why don't you come over here? There's really good jobs in the navy department."

I think the navy department at that time was on Constitution Avenue. So Alma went and applied. As a civil service person they could transfer, and they did. With a job opening with the navy, she went to work for the navy.

I sort of remembered that. She was much happier after she got in the navy. So in '54, when I got offered this scholarship to Illinois, that summer she was going to come out to visit. So I wrote her and I said, "Did you ever think about moving back here, maybe?"

And she said, "Well, if I could get a good job I would consider it." And she said, "Is there anything in Champaign or Banner that I might could look at?"

Well, there happened to be an air force base fifteen miles north of there at a place called Rantoul, Rantoul Air Force Base. And I said, "Well, I bet you they got civil service people there."

So when she came out in the summer, we went up to Champaign and she liked Champaign or Banner. And then we drove up to Rantoul. We went into the personnel office on the base, and they said, "Oh yeah, we got civil service people all over the place."

So I said, "You know, you could go back to Washington and just talk to the civil service people and say, "Hey, any chance I could transfer to the air force?"

After being in the army, the navy, and then the air force, they said, "Sure, if there's an opening and you can qualify for it."

So in November of that year, she called me and she said, "They told me I could transfer."

And I said, "Well?"

She said, "Do you still want me to come?"

And I said, "Come on."

So she came out in November of '54, and then we got married a little over a year later in January of '56.

**JE:** Let's talk about your children from your marriage. How many children do you have?

**DS:** I have four sons.

**JE:** And their names are?

**DS:** Paul, Paul's a veterinarian. Mike, Mike's an architect. Dan is a teacher and has been for many years out at Bishop Kelly. And Tim is a computer programmer; currently works for Hewlett Packard, but he worked eleven plus years at American Airlines, then for EDS and different people. They've all got graduate degrees, which they have all paid for. I did pay for the first one but not anymore, not any after that.

**JE:** How many grandchildren from all those children?

**DS:** I have nine grandchildren. They all live here and all the kids live here so we're pretty fortunate in that regard. We get to see them more so than most of our friends who their grandkids are scattered everywhere and their children are scattered everywhere.

## Chapter 05 - 8:47

### Back to Tulsa

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**John Erling:** You graduated from Illinois, and you studied then for your master's.

**Dick Schmitz:** I did. I didn't complete it, I just got burned out with school, I think, because I'd been going to school full-time, you might say, not only during the year but during the summertime. Because working those other two jobs, I couldn't take a full load. But I had enough hours to get into graduate school in January of my senior year.

So I went into graduate school then. Then I graduated in June of '56. But I just needed to get a job.

We'd gotten married in January, and she got pregnant almost immediately. So we got a child coming and I got her to take care of and I got to do better than this. So after

I'd graduated in '56, a lot of my classmates, those in broadcast and communications, you know, they were going to go to Chicago and get a job as an assistant floor manager for \$42.50 a week.

I said, "That's not for me."

So the two guys I mentioned before, Don Lanier, he became a minister and he went to seminary. The other one was Edward Yallowitz, he went to Evansville, Indiana, and got into an agency up there and was there a couple of years before he went to Chicago with Jay Walter Thompson. And I was not going to go to work for \$42.50 a week as an assistant floor manager at WBBM in Chicago.

A lot of my friends did, and maybe they did well as a result of that. But I kept thinking, "You know, I'd really like to go back to Tulsa. I love that." I would come back there and visit there once or twice a year with my folks. "And Alma's never been there so we'll just go back and see what it's like."

We drove down here and, of course, you know, the week I came down here there was nobody here because the NAB was going on in Chicago and all the managers and the people responsible, for the most part, for doing the hiring, there was one exception there. I went to Chicago and they weren't there so I couldn't interview with anybody except a few people who were extremely nice to me. And fortunately, there was one station here that had people here who could do the hiring. And that's where I got the job.

**JE:** And that station was?

**DS:** KAKC. The new KAKC, as it was described then.

**JE:** And that was what year and month?

**DS:** That would have been in April of 1957.

**JE:** What was your job then at KAKC?

**DS:** Well, I was hired as a mobile newsman. I guess I auditioned accidentally for the job because I'd been up there to talk to them and then I went away. And they asked me to come back and I talked to them. And they said, "Well, we'll give you a call. When are you going to be back in Tulsa?"

I said, "Well, I don't know. It sort of depends on whether I get a job." Because we had driven down here from Champaign and Banner where we were still living.

So as I was driving away from the station, which was at that time at 910 South Boston, a twelve-story building, as I recall, called the American Airlines building. And as I was driving away I went out by a school here just off the intersection of 15th and Lewis, trying to think what the name of that school was and it doesn't come to my mind right at this moment. But fire trucks were going crazy. They passed me, they went on, so I went down to follow the fire trucks to see where they were going. And they were going to the school.

So I parked the car away from the school area. Got out, walked up there, just to see what was happening. Well, somebody had had a problem in the kitchen, it was right about noon, and there was smoke and, of course, then they called the fire department. The fire department showed up.

Now at that time, KAKC, which had been operating on that basis of “news alive at fifty-five,” ever since August of ’56, that’s when they sort of started their new format. They had been operating that way so in April of ’57, they were chasing any siren that moved. Anything you heard, anything that had a red light on it, they were chasing. And I knew this because what they were describing to me as the job I would have was a mobile newsman.

So I got out of the car, I went up, I found out that there was nothing serious. And yet, this is the kind of report that KAKC would put on the air in an instant. So I got back in the car, I drove over to a place called the Delman Theater, which is at 15th and Lewis. I think there may have been a drugstore or something right next to it. I know I had access to a phone there, so I went in, picked up the phone, looked up the phone number for KAKC, and called it, told them who I was.

And the guy that answered the phone remembered talked to me. I said, “There’s a news story out here if you want it. It’s a nonexistent fire.”

“Oh, wait a minute! We’ll put you on the air.”

So I did a piece right there, probably thirty seconds of mumbling and scrambling around trying to find the words, but I told them what had happened. “The fire trucks were called to this—” and I had gotten the name of the school at that time, I don’t remember it now. It’s still there, but I called this report in, got back in the car, drove over to my aunt’s house where we were staying.

And in about thirty minutes, I got a phone call from the station. He said, “I want to know if you can come back down. We need to talk to you some more.”

And I had just been there. I said, “Yeah.” So I got in the car and drove back down there and they offered me the job.

**JE:** [laughing] What was your salary? Do you remember that?

**DS:** Well, it wasn’t \$42.50 a week. You want to know what it was?

**JE:** Yes.

**DS:** Four hundred dollars a month and a car, and a small expense account.

**JE:** You were in tall cotton, weren’t you?

**DS:** Boy, tell me about it.

**JE:** What other stations were then popular? And KAKC at that time, was that the top of the list yet? I want to talk about that.

**DS:** Yeah. KAKC had been dominant in that market with probably 30 to 40 percent ever since they went on the air back in August or September with that rock and roll format, the top

fifty. And most stations around the country that were doing rock and roll were doing top forty, but they elected to do top fifty. And I think it served us well to continue that process.

The thing about it is, when you say you got 30 to 40 percent of the audience, I mean, you had a big share of the audience yourself when you were on KRMG. It wasn't 30 or 40 percent, but it was big. And the thing about it is, that there were only five or six radio stations in Tulsa at the time, whereas what you were competing against was probably twenty-five different stations in either this market or one surrounding it. And as a result, it wasn't that big a deal if you had a good signal, which we didn't have except during the day it was pretty reasonable. But at night it caved into nothing, I mean, really, we couldn't get out of Sand Springs at night, basically, because it was a thousand watts in the daytime and five hundred at night. So as a result, we had this large share of the audience.

But the other stations that I was aware of, of course, when I came to Tulsa I was looking to get on a big fifty thousand watt station, which was KVOO and KRMG. Keith Bretts, who was the program director at KRMG had told me that if I didn't get a job at KAKC where he had pointed me to go, as well as some other people had done the same thing, he said if I didn't get a job he would hire me in June to do a night shift, if I wanted to come down.

I'll never forget the fact that he gave me that opportunity to make that move in case this other thing didn't pan out. He and I have talked about that many times since then. But nonetheless, the big stations in the powerwise were KVOO and KRMG and I really didn't have a clue about ratings at that time.

Ratings meant nothing to me until I'd been at KAKC for a few months and I found out exactly what ratings were all about. KOMA was another station. Another one was KTUL. Then there was another station, KFMJ. That was owned by Fred Jones Ford and the FMJ stood for Fred and Mary Jones. Those were the stations, and there was one or two FM stations. I think the station at TU was on the air, KWGS. Skelly had paid for that.

Then there was another station that Sonny Gray was involved in some way. They had the studios out on Harvard, but I'm not sure what those call letters were or what they later became. But FM was not a significant factor in any way because, first of all, you couldn't hear it in your car. Second of all, nobody really knew what it was. So it was just a competition among five or six AM radio stations. We were about the weakest station of the bunch.

**JE:** But you each had your own niche because KVOO would have been country.

**DS:** No, KVOO was not country until much later. They didn't become country until Jack Cresse took over and made it country. Before that it was pure network and straight-on playing the music of the times, which at that time was whatever music was popular in the late '40s, early '50s.

**JE:** Probably Cochran and—

**DS:** Joe, Joe Stafford—

**JE:** Sinatra.

**DS:** ...Sinatra, people like that.

**JE:** Right, right.

**DS:** No, they were not country until probably well into the '60s.

**JE:** What was KRMG doing at that time?

**DS:** KRMG was doing the same thing. Now they had a topnotch jock named Joe Knight that was on in the afternoons. But he left just about the time I arrived here, and went to Baltimore. And Johnny Chick took over that afternoon show and he did well.

**JE:** So they took network news, I suppose, I don't know what they were affiliated with, KRMG. Was Ken Greenwood there then when you came?

**DS:** No he wasn't, no he was not. Frank Lane was the general manager at that time and I don't know who was after him. Ken came along probably in the mid '60s, maybe early '60s, something like that.

**JE:** Okay.

## **Chapter 06 - 5:03**

### **Rock and Roll**

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**John Erling:** But it was rock and roll that dominated the market in KAKC.

**Dick Schmitz:** It really did. We weren't the first to play rock and roll. The first to play rhythm and blues, i.e., rock and roll of some sort, was a fellow by the name of Frank Berry, who had been on KAKC in the early '50s for a short time, but he also mainly was at KTUL radio.

And then the guy that really started what you call mainstream rock and roll was Don Wallace. And he was on KOME. He had only been doing it for maybe a few months when KAKC started their format in August or September of '56. John Wooly described it in his article, "Rock Oklahoma," or whatever the name of it was, but he wrote a superb historical perspective on rock and roll in Tulsa and in Oklahoma, to a certain extent and he said that Wallace was getting a lot of attention until, in his words, "the KAKC juggernaut came along."

And that's what it was because this station, and I wasn't there the first eight months, but from August until about April it was strictly bang, bang, bang, rock and roll all day long, twenty-four hours a day.

**JE:** You remember if Oklahoma City and KOME and those stations had already gone rock and roll?

**DS:** No they hadn't. In fact, Lee Allen Smith and Danny Williams came over to visit with us to see what we had done to kick things off for WKY. I do not know the historical angles of Oklahoma City radio. I just know that WKY owned that market for a long time.

Danny was a great morning man. Leon Smith, he and Greenwood may have been the best station managers ever in the state. But Lee Allen did a great job over there.

**JE:** So KAKC was the first rock and roll station in Oklahoma.

**DS:** Well, the first one that just pounded away at it. That's what we understand. We just were not aware of anything going on in the state other than our station and what Don Wallace had been doing. But then Don, in fairness to Don, he went to Oklahoma City, and he started doing things over there and he did great in Oklahoma City. And he'd been in rock and roll for years over there and had top ratings.

**JE:** You started as a newsman but somehow you worked your way into becoming a disc jockey. How did that work?

**DS:** Well, I was supposed to be just a newsman, you know, I could be on the street for anytime during a twenty-four-hour period. I started at KAKC in April of '57. Part of my commitment was to also work Sunday nights, if you can believe it. Here's a mobile newsman that had to get up at five thirty in the morning, but he also had to work the six to midnight shift on Sunday nights.

So I was doing it and that was one of those things where the very first night I went in there they had never shown me anything about this board, and I had not been running a board in Champaign or Banner because we had engineers that did that. And so I walked in there and I said, "Well, where are the switches? Where's the mic switch? Where's this?" and it wasn't marked.

"Oh, well, here's the mic switch, here's the turntables switch, here are the records, here are the commercials, here's the list. See ya."

You know, Tom Land in Fairfield, he would have fired me instantaneously considering he let me go on the sportscast, but by the time I got through the first six hours on KAKC on a Sunday night it was a disaster. But I still got through it and as long as we got the new on at fifty-five, that's all that really mattered.

But that then developed into I would do things on the air and made up little things and said things that our program director thought were funny. And our program director was a great morning jock, a fellow named John Trotter, and he was working six to ten in the mornings.

John would listen to me, believe it or not, on Sunday nights. He would laugh and he'd come in the next morning and talk about it, "Hey, what you said last night was a funny bit!" and so forth. He didn't want to work four hours in the morning so he decided he would add to the disc jockey.



Now the disc jockeys were known as the “big 5 DJs,” that’s how they started out from day one. So he decided he was going to expand that staff to the “big 7 DJs,” which he did. That way he cut an hour off his time, he got off at nine. Then I came in and he put me on the air from nine to eleven.

I wasn’t sure that was a good thing to do but he thought I could do it. So I did it from nine to eleven from September until December of ’57. In addition to being the mobile newsman.

In December, he got a job offer in Los Angeles. Big station. Took the job and the week before he was leaving, he said, “Can you work the morning show?”

And I said, “What do you mean, me work the morning show?”

He said, “You ought to work this morning show. There’s nobody else here that would do it like you would.”

And I said, “I don’t know whether that’s good or bad.”

He said, “I’m going to tell the management. If you’ll tell me that you agree to do it I’ll bet they’ll let you do it.”

I said, “Well, I’ll give it a try.” So that’s what happened, that’s how I got on the morning show from six to nine.

Ten months later, and I guess it was September of ’58, our program director got a job out in Oregon someplace, Chris Lane. He had taken John’s place as the program director. Chris went out west and they promoted me to program director. I had been an assistant program director.

## Chapter 07 - 2:55

### Elvis Presley

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**John Erling:** Tell me about the music and the performers that you guys were playing there in ’57, ’58.

**Dick Schmitz:** You know, obviously it started with Elvis, Bobby Darien, Jerry Lee Lewis, Frogman Henry. I could go on and on but—

**JE:** But Elvis was—

**DS:** Chuck Berry, you know.

**JE:** ...he kind of in ’56, did it. You had a request line, I suppose?

**DS:** We did, we didn’t pay any attention to it but we—[laughing]

**JE:** All right. And then wasn’t he the overall number one performer?

**DS:** Oh yeah, at that point, yeah. But then, of course, guys started coming up like Chuck Berry and Freddy Cannon and even the Kingston Trio and Buddy Holly and the Crickets, you

know, the Big Bopper. All those people kept coming up, but the thing about it was that Elvis was really the key until some of what you might call the more radical rock stars began to appear, like Chuck Berry, for example. They just all melded into the system, and with our being able to play fifty records during the week, plus what was called a “pick-hit” and a “pick-album,” those were two pieces that we thought might work well as up and comers, you might say.

Speaking of up and comers, we also had another group of ten records called “up and comers.” So you had fifty regular records that were rated one to fifty for popularity during that week. And we put this list out every week in the record stores and at the station and any place else that wanted to carry them.

Then we would have a pick-hit, a single. Then we’d have a pick-album. Then we would have what were called the up and comers, ten of them. Later on, that was modified into a pick-pair of albums, I think it was, and so forth. But that was later.

**JE:** You went by Dick Schmitz all the time, didn’t you?

**DS:** I did and people said, “Well, that’s sort of strange, you know, that’s not an easy name to remember, you know.”

I said, “Well, I just felt like, you know, that’s my name, and why not? You know, a lot of guys would have changed their names but I didn’t advocate that for the people that I hired and the people who came to work there. Some guys just insisted they wanted to change their name.

But Scooter Segraves, for example, he came in and somebody decided he should be known as Don Day. I was out of town when that occurred. I had hired Scooter but then I went to cover the Miss America Pageant with Anita Bryant in 1959, and when I got back, Don Day was on the air from midnight to six. And the next night, Don Day became some other name, some celebrity. Then he became another one, because I kept changing it.

And I said, “Why in the world would we want to do this with a name like Scooter Segraves? I mean, I don’t care if you can spell it or not, nobody ever spells his name right. It’s Segraves, and most people spell it Seagraves. But anyway, we finally after about a week of confusing people midnight to six, which really didn’t matter a heck of a lot, it became Scooter Segraves and it stayed that way, thank goodness.

## Chapter 08 - 2:43

### Payola

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**John Erling:** Well, you were the host of the morning program, six to nine, on KAKC for many,

many years. So that was a very powerful position in rock and roll. I am wondering, the issue of payola, did that come to your station?

**Dick Schmitz:** It did but it didn't affect anybody. The closest it came, probably, unless there's something that I didn't know about, that's not likely that that would happen because the people we hired, they just didn't do that. And I'm so proud of the ones that did work there that I was able to work with. Gosh, it's one of these things where I've been around people who wouldn't hire somebody better than them because they were afraid of being overshadowed.

My idea was, I'm going to get anybody I can that's better than me that wants to work for us. And that's what I did and you can just look at the list of names of the people who worked there.

But the matter of payola, to answer your question, I was given on one occasion a wristwatch by a record producer. It's the only record that I think he ever had but it was a sort of a cheap wristwatch. And he said, "No, I want you to have it. I've been giving them to everybody I've been seeing and talking to, and so forth."

So I took the wristwatch. I don't know whatever even happened to it. I never wore it, I never thought about it. And can you believe this? Within about four or five, maybe six months, as I recall, the matter of payola came up in the Congress. And I'm thinking, "Oh my gosh, I never should have kept that watch, you know."

And I told the manager about it and he said, "Just forget about it, don't worry about it. It's not anything. You didn't agree to play the record?"

I said, "Of course not. As a matter of fact, we didn't play the record because it was lousy."

So that's as close as I know that it came to our station.

**JE:** So you weren't asked by record producers or promoters to play our songs?

**DS:** I was asked to play the songs but I was never offered anything to do it.

**JE:** All right.

**DS:** And I got to be really good friends with the record distributors. Most of them were out of Oklahoma City. Some of them lived here but they worked for companies out of Oklahoma City.

**JE:** You may have taken the right path but you missed out on a lot of money, ha-ha-ha.

Danny Williams has been interviewed here on [VoicesofOklahoma.com](http://VoicesofOklahoma.com), and he spoke openly about the payola that he accepted.

**DS:** Really?

**JE:** And he was swimming in money, as a result of that. Until Congress did crack down on it. But prior to that it was big-time and he would absolutely sell a lot of records by what he did.

**DS:** Well, if it was a good record I'm glad that he did, but had anybody ever specifically offered that to me I would have asked them to leave. I couldn't do that.

**JE:** Yeah.

**Chapter 09 - 9:04****Radio Personalities**

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**John Erling:** You were the program director of KAKC and you hired some talented people.

Let's talk about some of them. Who are they?

**Dick Schmitz:** Well, Clayton Vaughn, who was a prominent newsman, I mean, he's still around but he's retired here in town for many, many years. And one of the most highly respected reporters that I've ever met.

**JE:** And you hired him as a newsman?

**DS:** I—I hired him as a mobile newsman.

**JE:** And where was he when you hired him?

**DS:** He was in Cushing, Oklahoma. When I was named program director we didn't really have a mobile newsman at that time. Different guys like Harry Wilson and a couple of other fellows were covering extra news. We had a news director, the same one that I had worked for when I first joined the station. But when I became name program director in the fall of '58, then we definitely needed somebody else to go out and cover the news and so I hired Clayton. I think that was probably November or so that I got him out of Cushing. And he came in and started to work as a mobile newsman, working under the fellow that I'd worked under.

Then that newsman, a fellow by the name of Bud Curry, got another position and I think he may have moved to Atlanta. He left and Clayton was the mobile newsman and I was just so impressed with what he was doing in Tulsa for KAKC that I asked him if he would be the news director. And he did become the news director. That's how I got Clayton.

**JE:** So you guys are in your early twenties, about this time? Would that be correct?

**DS:** I was probably almost twenty-three.

**JE:** And Clayton about the same age?

**DS:** Yeah, he's about two weeks younger than I am.

**JE:** Okay. Other names?

**DS:** Other people, well, Scooter Segraves we've talked about, who was a great jockey. He was at TU at the time that I hired him to work the midnight to six show on KAKC.

And then Don Kelly was another one who had great ratings and had a very funny character, a make-believe character named Chauncey.

Danny Dark, who went on to be the voice of NBC. Danny passed away a couple of years ago.

**JE:** Was Danny an Oklahoman?

**DS:** Yes, yes. In fact, his mom and dad lived here and he grew up here. He got his first radio job, I think, maybe up in Springfield, Missouri. Then he came back here and went to work for KOMA. And I heard him on the air, it was like in September of '58, before I'd been named program director.

Funny story there was that our program director, Chris Lane, was out in Oregon, I think it was Oregon, interviewing for this job that he eventually took. I think that's where he went, to Portland. But he was interviewing for this job, so we needed to get somebody, we were short a guy, or were going to be.

And so I heard Danny on the air and I thought, "This guy has a great voice." At first I thought he was a network guy. Then I found out he was working over at KOMA, about just two blocks away from our building at 9th and Boston.

So I called Chris and I said, "You've got to hear this guy," and he was working nights. So we put the phone up to the radio and let him listen to him. And he had this great resonant voice, just project, just tremendous. Let him listen to it for a couple of minutes while he was talking, and pulled the phone away and said, "What do you think?"

"Oh, I don't know. I'm not sure that he's got that good a sound for us," and so forth.

And I said, "Well, we can teach him how to do what we do, you know. He's got the tools."

"Well, I don't know," he said. "Have you talked to the manager?" a fellow by the name of Bob Hothe.

And I said, "Well, he's sitting right here in the office. He thinks we ought to hire him."

And then Bob jumped in on the phone. He said, "Yeah," he said, "I think this would probably be a good move for us. We need somebody—if the guy was available."

And I hadn't even talked to him, but I kept hearing him.

So the next day, I went over to see him and I got in this old rickety old elevator to go up to the floor where the station was, and I'd never been there. It was four or five o'clock in the afternoon, maybe later, could have been five thirty or six, now that I think about it. So I got on this elevator, rode up, the doors open, and right there is the glass that leads into the control room. I mean, you walked off the elevator, you walk five steps ahead and you'll crash into the control room glass.

And here's this kid sitting there at the microphone. He looks up, his hands and his arms just jerked, his head snapped, and I went, "What is the matter with this guy?" He wasn't on the air at the time, I mean, he was on the air but the network was on or music or something.

He came running out of there, he said, "You're Dick Schmitz! You're Dick Schmitz!"

I said, "I know, I know. I was when I got in the elevator."

And he said, "What are you doing?"

And I said, "Are you Danny?"

And he said, "Yeah."

I said, "I came to see if maybe you'd like to think about coming to work for us."

"Oh, my goodness," he was just going crazy. So he said, "I'd love to! I'd love to!"

I don't know how he knew me, I mean, my picture was on the top fifty list, but that reaction was just over the top. That's been the way it was up until the day he died. Every time we would talk when he was in Los Angeles, we just had this affinity for each other and he had a great voice. So he came to work for us.

And when he came over to the station to do the formal interview, I know he had plaid pants on and like a chartreuse-colored type jacket and striped shirt. He looked like a clown, but that was the best he could dress up at that time.

We offered him the job. It was going to be from nine to midnight.

**JE:** Then he went on, you said he was the voice for NBC, but he was the voice for many commercials.

**DS:** Oh my, yeah. He did a lot of stuff for Kraft and for Keebler and for Budweiser for many, many years. They used to use Ed McMahon, and then another guy before that, but then he was the long-time voice of Budweiser as well, plus so many other spots. And we talked two or three, four times a year.

And I went out to visit him one time at his home in Brentwood, that was shortly after the OJ Simpson thing out there. I would ask him, "So how are things going?"

He'd say, "Oh, Dick, they're just backing up the truck and unloading the money."

He bought the house in Brentwood for about four hundred thousand and still kept for a couple of years his house in Malibu. Now that's the kind of truck that was driving up and unloading the money.

**JE:** Did he do commercial work here in Tulsa?

**DS:** He didn't really do much here before he left. He only worked for me for about a year.

**JE:** Did he on his own look for Los Angeles and want to work out there or was he discovered?

**DS:** He left here—he either went to Miami or New Orleans, and I don't know which one it was. But then he eventually ended up in Cleveland. He was there for a while. I can't give you the order except the last two cities before he went to Los Angeles were Cleveland and then St. Louis. He was in St. Louis and you did that routine and you didn't like it and you left. But he liked it and he stayed on KXOK, first, and then I think he was on WYL, then Los Angeles came calling. And he didn't even work for the station in Los Angeles all that long. He was there long enough to get exposed and get a good agent. That's what's required out there.

And he got a good agent and he started doing commercials and that was the end of the road, as far as the daily radio shift.

**JE:** Another talent that you hired at KAKC in about '58?

**DS:** Well, I didn't hire him in '58, but sometime probably in '61 or '62 was Bob Brown. Bo was just a wonderful guy, still is a great friend. I think I must have hired him in the early '60s. He worked for us for a couple of years, did the noon to three shift, as I recall. Or maybe

noon to two, I can't remember what it was. But he also did some news coverage, and so forth. Just a talented guy and an incredible voice, had a great delivery.

I was just so proud of being associated with Bob. I had met him when he was just like sixteen years old, when he and I were both in a play at Tulsa Little Theater called *The Caine Mutiny Court-Martial*. He played a seaman, a young seaman who had been on the ship. And if you know the story of *The Caine Mutiny Court-Martial*, well, there were a bunch of different characters that were on that ship with Captain Queeg that had to testify for or against him in the trial. And that's really what it was about, it was the court-martial, basically that whole thing with the court-martial.

Carl Jansen was another outstanding, marvelous, long-time radio guy who played wonderfully Captain Queeg in *The Caine Mutiny Court-Martial*.

**JE:** Bob, how long was he here?

**DS:** He was here a couple of years, I think. He and Clayton both left at about the same time to go to KOTV. Bob went as a newsman, Clayton went as, if not the news director, he certainly became that very soon after he left. And that would have been probably, I'm going to say, late '64 or early '65, something, I'm not sure. Clayton may have gone just a little bit before Bob did. In fact, Clayton may have hired Bob, now that I think about it. But I know they left fairly close together.

**JE:** Bob then made it to ABC in New York. How did that happen?

**DS:** He went to Houston first, I believe, and worked down there for a sister station of KOTV, whoever owned it at that time, it may have been Corinthian. I keep thinking maybe he came back to Tulsa for a while and finally then, KABC in New York hired him, or ABC Television is where eventually he wound up, you know, doing 20/20. Mainly.

I'm not sure how that all transitioned but that's where he ended up. They did not renew his contract a year or two ago. That's why he hasn't been seen on 20/20. Of course, ever since Hugh Downs and Barbara Walters quit doing it that whole format has sort of changed considerably and now I think he's just as happy.

He still does periodic things on the History Channel and other things, but he's fine.

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

## Chapter 10 - 4:52

### Captain Jack

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**John Erling:** Talk about Tulsa in the '50s. The downtown stores, some of the sponsors of your programs, and those type of things.

**Dick Schmitz:** Oh my gosh, well, the things that you remember are the things that are related to teenagers and stations. But one of the most popular hotspots for kids and for eating was Barney's Hub Drive-In. Barney's Hub Drive-In was at the intersection of 11th and Boulder, I think. It's a parking lot now across from that church. It was situated there and it was like a Sonic. It was the Sonic of the time except there was only one.

Another restaurant that was very dominant and well-attended was on the southwest corner of 10th and Boston. That was a place called Cops. They were mainly known for charbroiled hamburgers and steaks, and so forth. And that was a great lunch place for us because our station was right there, you know, half a block away.

And then downtown, of course, was Bishop's, which was just a tradition for forever here in Tulsa up until it closed sometime probably in the '60s, I suspect.

As far as other stores, there was stores like Vandevors and Brown Duncan, Renberg's and Clarke's, Harry Clarke and Madge Clarke Wright, they were great friends of ours and great sponsors of different things.

After we started our production company, well, Madge did all the commercials for Clarke's and she just found it so easy to come here and record. She sat right here in this room doing the commercials, I'll bet you, three or four years before they sold the store. She was just a delight to work with. And Harry was a great guy too.

Harry got me involved with the United Way and that's one of those things that I'll always be grateful for. He's just really a good guy.

**JE:** You were the morning man for eight years, is that true?

**DS:** Not the whole time. Finally sort of got to me having to get up at five thirty in the morning and get over there, work on the air for three hours, and then basically, spend the next eight to nine hours try to take care of programming stuff and trying to manage people, and this sort of thing, both in the news department as well as the disc jockeys. It just finally got to me. It was just too much, too long a day.

So Harry Wilson took over the morning show in the middle of that run. I probably was on the air doing the morning show from December of '57 until maybe '60, '61, somewhere in that area. And then I started doing a nine to eleven shift, just two hours, later in the morning so I didn't have to spend the whole darn day here. Harry did that thing for about two or three years.

Then I went back on it and we put Harry in the news department, or he wanted to go into news, so he went in as the news director when Clayton left. So I went back on the morning show from probably '63 or early '64, when Clayton left, and I was on it then until I left there in March of '66.

So all in all, I probably had it five or five and a half years, and Harry had it maybe three. Something like that.



**JE:** Did you have a shtick in the morning? Did you have some kind of a character? What was your...?

**DS:** Oh, I really did when I started out. I think that's what attracted the program director at the time to put me on the air as a disc jockey. I used to do a character called Captain Jack, which was just a silly character. "Captain Jack talked a little like this and he was always off mic, and he was always gruff and mean." [in an accented voice] And I wasn't near as good at doing the two voice back and forth as Don Kelly was with his character, Chauncey.

But I'd say, "Well, Captain Jack, what do you got to say this morning?"

"Well, I'm a little bit ticked off, Dick."

"What's that?" And I'm sorry I'm not sounding much different from one from the other at this point, but I said, "What's the problem?"

"Well, you know, last week I told the kids to send in their quarters for the little secret decoding ring that we were offering."

"Yeah, I sort of remember that. That bothered me a little bit when you did that."

"Well, I'll tell ya, it bothered me too because you know what? Nobody sent in any quarters. But, in fairness to everybody concerned, we went ahead and sent out the decoding rings to everybody anyway."

And I said, "Oh, you did? What about this?"

"Well, we're going to tell the kids now that they're supposed to open up the little top of the decoding ring, very carefully unscrew it, open it up, and look in there. You see that? See that? That's a pill. I want you to take that pill. Okay, did you take the pill? All right now, kids, that's poison. When Captain Jack says, 'Send in the quarter, send in the quarters.'"

Well, of course, none of this ever happened, see, but it was just a thing that got their attention. And one other character, which I don't remember what I did with any of it, was Edgar Bergen with Charlie McCarthy had a character called Mortimer Snerd, so I developed a character called Herkamer. "And Herkamer had very brilliant things to say, which fortunately, I don't remember any of them." [in a funny voice] But anyway, it was just a takeoff on Mortimer Snerd, which was bad and it didn't last, neither did Captain Jack, thank goodness.

## Chapter 11 - 2:32

### Radio Promotions

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**John Erling:** What about unusual promotions the station would have engaged in?

**Dick Schmitz:** Well, they had a treasure hunt one time that was just great fun writing the clues.

It was something like for ten thousand dollars, if you found whatever it was they were looking for. They gave them all kinds of clues and it ended up being found somewhere in the vicinity of 41st and Sheridan.

Now you got to remember about that time there wasn't a lot out there. I mean, it was basically starting to be an industrial area. But this thing was out there on one side street. I don't know whether it was buried or was in a tree or what, but we led people all over the city. They went to Chandler Park, they went to Mohawk Park, we had them going everywhere. These clues were deceptive but they were truthful as well. We would talk about a park, I'm just using that as an example, there must have been some sort of a little park out in that general area that we were alluding to. But people, when you think of park at that time, it was Mohawk Park or maybe Chandler Park. I'm not sure LaFortune had even been completed at that point. But nonetheless, that was a big thing. And it diminished in value every day it wasn't found.

Now this company that came in and hid the treasure—we hired this company to do this, I don't know who it was, I wasn't involved in that part of it. I was only involved in disseminating the clues and arranging, to a certain extent, how the sponsors handled it, and so forth. But there was an insurance policy that if they found it when it was ten thousand dollars, we were covered. We hired this company and they wanted to get it down to where it wasn't found until at least it was down under a couple thousand dollars.

And I may not be remembering this exactly at all. Somebody else out there may have a lot better handle on this than I do, but that created the biggest traffic jam I think I ever saw out around 41st and Sheridan, and it was a bad promotion, as far as I was concerned.

**JE:** A mab, a mob scene?

**DS:** It really was because they were getting so close. And finally, somebody did find it, but by that time the amount had diminished down to maybe a couple thousand or something like that.

**JE:** But that had to be the talk of the town. I mean, that was huge.

**DS:** It was, it really was. And another promotion we did, which was great fun, I didn't consider that to be a good promotion, but another one we had a big concert out there where Clear Channel, I think, was for a while, north of the intersection of 31st and Memorial. There's a big building out there that used to be Ertley's, which was a discount store that started on 11th Street. They were out there and we had a big concert in that parking lot one time and it just overflowed the concert. I don't even know who played. I think Rodney and the Blazers may have been involved, and they were from up in Coffeerville. And Rodney Lay became Roy Clark's band leader for about fourteen years after the Blazers disbanded.

But that was another major type promotion. Of course, we had—

**Chapter 12 - 12:29****Radio Promos: Leon Russell/Ray Charles**

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**Dick Schmitz:** ...the show stars that came in down at the Municipal Theater. We had Dick Clark's *Caravan of Stars*. Chuck Berry came and played at the Continental Roller Rink, it was just west of 11th and Peoria. It's now part of the interstate system at this point now. It's just gone.

Jerry Lee Lewis was another one. Jerry Lee Lewis, I could tell you a quickie, funny story about him. He had developed a reputation for tearing up pianos. If you ever watched him play the piano you could understand why, because he would pound on it, he'd put his feet on it. And so when we promoted the fact that Jerry Lee Lewis was going to come in and do what we called a "record hop," only with live entertainment, I went to get a piano. And I couldn't get one.

Jenkins Music Company wouldn't rent me one. I tried a couple of other people. "No, we heard the promotion on the air of Jerry Lee. We can't take a chance on that, can't take a chance."

But I found one guy who was a friend of mine. He had a little blond piano, about the color of these desks, and he had just a little spinet.

And I said, "Would you please let me borrow your piano?" I said, "I promise you it'll be okay."

Well, I was promising nothing because I didn't know. I hadn't talked to Jerry Lee or anything. Anyway, he said, "Okay, I'll let you do it."

So we made arrangements to get the piano to the stage at the Continental Rink. Jerry came in that morning or early afternoon and he wanted to go down and see the piano and see the set-up for the stage. And so we took him down there.

And I said, "Jerry Lee, I got something I got to ask you."

"Yeah?"

I said, "Please, please, I had more trouble getting a piano, I almost had to cancel this thing because I couldn't get a piano. They were afraid of you." And he's just looking at me. And I said, "You know why."

And he said, "Okay."

And I said, "Please, this piano belongs to a friend of mine. It is not rented, it's just a friend of mine loaned me this piano. Please don't tear it up."

He said, "Don't worry about it."

Well, that kind of response makes me wonder, but he was great. He absolutely played it just like a piano ought to be handled. I mean, he got up and did his thing, and so forth,

but his feet didn't touch the keys. He didn't stand up on top of it. He didn't bang it around with his fist, or anything like that. It was in fine shape when we got through, and he did exactly that, there was no problem.

**John Erling:** All these performances in Tulsa, what venue were they held in?

**DS:** The ones I'm talking about there with Jerry Lee and Chuck Berry, they were here at other times at the Municipal Theater, but they were also part of a big show. Like as I mentioned, Dick Clark's *Caravan of Stars*. Or *The Show of Stars*. Those were big shows that came in. They would have a dozen to fifteen different acts. I mean, it would not be uncommon to have Chuck Berry, Jerry Lee Lewis, Freddy Cannon, Paul Anka, all these people would be on the same show. It was when they were just starting out. They'd come out and do one song and then they'd go off. Come out and do one song and they'd go off.

But in this case, with Jerry Lee, that was at the Continental Roller Rink. And Chuck Berry was there also, and Conway Twitty was there, David Gates. David Gates is a Tulsa boy. He backed up most of these acts, he had a band. A fellow by the name of Russell Bridges, now known as Leon Russell, was his piano player.

They would come in, this four- or five-piece group, and they would play and back up these artists. Well, that was a good start for David because he got acquainted with some of these guys and we paid David's band eighty-five dollars, or something like that, to do this. We might pay the artist ten times that, which was nothing compared to today's pay. But the thing about it was David wanted to work those gigs and he did it. He did a great job on it.

And it was just remarkable how his group with Russell Bridges, or Leon Russell, as part of it. That was before he was Leon Russell.

I don't know whether you know where the name Leon Russell came from or not.

**JE:** Where?

**DS:** Leon Russell came from the fact that his first name is Russell, his last name is Bridges, but when he and Gates, and I don't know if they went at the same time, went to Los Angeles, they were both playing as sidemen in different groups. In other words, big stars would come in before they were stars, and say, "Well, we need a piano player."

"Well, there's this guy down here from Tulsa, Leon." And they called him Leon because everybody, if they knew anything about country music, they knew who Leon McAuliffe was. And Leon McAuliffe was the steel guitar guy for Bob Wills' band. So he picked up this nickname of Leon. And that's where he picked up Leon Russell, that's where it came from.

They would play at the Continental Rink. Sometimes we had these events at the Cimarron Ballroom where KRMG used to be located. They moved and then they tore the ballroom down. That was a sad thing.

**JE:** So you were around all these people then, and Dick Clark, did you have any interaction with him at all?

**DS:** Well, boy, this goes back, but this was the thing where he was taking his caravan of stars all over the country. And of course, he was doing his Saturday *Bandstand* show. And on that show he would promote the cities that he would be in the next week. Then he'd be back in time to do the show live on Saturday from Philadelphia or New York, wherever he was doing it.

As it turned out, we booked the Dick Clark *Caravan of Stars*, and from day one, he was supposed to be here. He was supposed to be here to emcee the show and do the whole thing. We had it on, "Dick Clark and the *Caravan of Stars*, in person, Dick Clark," and all this stuff. I don't know who was on the show, it didn't matter. But the point was, he was going to be here.

Well, I happened to see the *Bandstand* show. I turned it on the week before he was due here. I wanted to see him just mention Tulsa, that was what I wanted to see. He mentioned about two places he was going to be, neither of which was Tulsa. But then he said, "The show will also be in Tulsa next so and so," and he would always say, "I'll see you in Sioux City," or, "I'll see you in St. Louis," or, "I'll see you in Dallas." He didn't say that.

So I got on the phone Saturday afternoon and made a phone call to my contact, and I said, "Is Dick Clark going to be here for this show next...?" whatever it was, Friday or Saturday night.

"Well, no, he's not scheduled to be there. Oh, yes he is!"

And I didn't have a contract that said he was going to be there in person, but that was the understanding from day one.

So by Monday, I was talking to one of his management people, a gal by the name of Rosalind Ross. And she said, "I just don't think that was ever part of the arrangement."

I said, "Well, the people I talked to, it was."

She said, "Let me see what I can do." She got hold of Clark that day and told him the circumstances of what was going on, how we were promoting this show, and had a big sale on the tickets already, and so forth.

He said, "Okay, let's see if we can work something out, because I've got to do this that day. But if I can get a flight here and get a flight to there, we'll see what we can do."

So in the meantime, between that Monday and whenever the show was in fact going to be on, I don't remember the night but it was probably near the end of the week, they made flight arrangements. And at that time, they weren't flying big jets, you know, to an extent. I mean, he probably did fly on a 707 or something out of Los Angeles, which was where he was, to get to somewhere. But he didn't get that coming in to here, as I recall.

Anyway, as it turned out, he made all kinds of arrangements to get here, and he did get here, but not until the intermission of the show. And at that time, I'd talked to some of my

friends at the police department and said, "Can we get him down here from the airport, the old municipal airport, like in a hurry?"

They said, "We'll take care of it." So they went out and they met him. They got him a police car or something and they brought him down there. And they weren't siren but they were moving pretty quick. They got him down there and he walked in the back.

He walked up and the first thing that stunned me was how short he was. But anyway, he came up. I walked over, and I said, "Dick, I'm Dick Schmitz," and I said, "thank you for going to all this trouble."

He said, "I don't know how this all happened, but we made it. I'm glad I'm here, I'm sorry I'm late."

I said, "Don't worry about it." We knew he was on the way when they took the break for the intermission. And I went out, Scooter or somebody, went out and said, "Dick Clark is on the way. He just arrived at the airport and his plane was late." We blamed the plane, the whole routine.

So he got here and he came on stage and he just wowed everybody. And he was just a delight to work with. He really went over and above to come and do this program for us. It was just tremendous.

**JE:** Other names that go back there? Smothers Brothers, they were big back then.

**DS:** Boy, they were funny, and they appeared, you know, by themselves. They didn't appear with other group.

Roger Williams did a number of concerts for us, just a great guy. Just a very, very informal type person and a wonderful musician.

**JE:** What about Ray Charles? Did you bring him in?

**DS:** Ray Charles, there's a great story about Ray Charles in that he had just hit big-time with his record, "I Can't Stop Loving You." Now he'd been big in the rhythm and blues and the rock, you know, "What Did I Say?" and "I Got A Woman," this type of stuff. But he'd never done anything quite like, "I Can't Stop Loving You," song.

So then he put out this country and western album. Well, right at the peak of that big popularity, we tied in with the Golden Hurricane Club, which was the supporting unit for the TU sports. And it was athletically inclined, but the thing was, that they raised a lot of funds for them.

So they made arrangements for us to get Skelly Stadium, which was the small stadium at the time, could only hold about 22,000, 23,000 people. Before they had expanded any of it.

But Charles was really booming at the top of the charts. So we had a chance to book him and get the stadium. So we decided, since it was going to be in August, we'd take our chances with the rain and the weather, because it didn't rain a lot in August in Oklahoma.

We'd take our chances, and we called it, "Ray Charles: Concert under the Stars." Everything was just a marvelous setup. We didn't have to pay for the stadium. There were no reserved seats. We priced the tickets at something like eight or ten bucks apiece.

In the trade magazines, like in *Billboard*, or *Music Reporter*, or *Cashbox*, I would read about the Ray Charles' concerts. And I think this was the time when Ray was having some real drug problems, and that's not a secret, so I'm going to say that. I don't know that to be a fact, but it seems to explain why, in some of these venues, in Colorado, for example, and, I think, in Iowa somewhere, he would come on stage and be there for maybe ten minutes. That was it. That was the concert.

They were doing all these reports all over the country, how bad things were because he wouldn't perform except for two or three songs.

So I'm really getting panicky. It's sort of like the Dick Clark thing that I was telling you about, I'm a little panicky because we've been promoting this and it's not going to happen.

Well, I couldn't do anything. I couldn't talk to his management, there was nothing, we just had to wait it out.

So came the day of the concert, and came that night, they called me and said, "Ray is here," and so forth. I think they were at the Mayo. If they weren't there, they were in town, at least. We'd agreed to meet them out there at the stadium, and this concert was going to start around seven thirty, eight o'clock, when it was just getting dark.

We got out there and he was in one of the dressing rooms down there on the west side at the north end. Had his band out there doing something first. Then the Raylettes came on to do some singing. Then they took an intermission. He was going to come on after intermission. And that was the way it was promoted.

I'm still just quaking in my boots, wondering what's going to happen here. Because we had a good crowd. It wasn't a sellout or anything like that, but it was a big crowd on the west side. And the stage was set up facing the west.

So he comes out of the locker room and he's got a couple of guys on each side of him. I don't know whether they were just guiding him or his bodyguards or what, but I walked up. And the manager came up and introduced us, I guess, his manager. He said, "Glad to meet you," you know, just like that.

But the weather was beautiful. Temperature was probably seventy-five degrees, not a cloud in the sky. The stars, just as exactly as we described, a concert under the stars. He comes out, "Ah, this is nice. This is nice." Because there was no wind, it was gorgeous. And he was just enjoying the weather.

And I thought, "Well, that's a positive reaction right off the back."

So we walk all the way down. We introduce him. He gets up on the stage, gets at the piano, and at various times the girls would come on and sing with him when he was doing

something. And he was on the stage at least forty-five minutes to an hour. My recollection is it might have even been longer than that. And he played and played and played and played everything you could think of and just knocked them dead.

Lucked out again, I guess, that's all I can say, but it was great.

**JE:** The nice weather held him on stage, maybe.

**DS:** It may very well have. May very well have.

**JE:** Yeah.

## Chapter 13 - 6:45

### Radio Promos: Anita Bryant

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**John Erling:** I think there was a very famous person who came from this state, her name was Anita Bryant. I think you've met her a few times.

**Dick Schmitz:** We have, as a matter of fact. Did a little thing with her called the Miss Tulsa Pageant, but at first it started with Miss KAKC. Our station, I'm not sure of the year, I think it was in '58, early '58, decided to have our own contest and sponsor our own entry in the Miss Tulsa Contest, which was going to be coming up a little bit later in the year.

So we had the Miss KAKC Contest and probably had about twenty girls enter it. Anita was one of them, and she ended up winning Miss KAKC title.

**JE:** Were you a judge?

**DS:** Naw, no, I was sort of the producer. I just organized it, you might say. So—

**JE:** She was going to school then, wasn't she?

**DS:** She was—

**JE:** Yeah.

**DS:** ...either in high school or just graduated, I'm not sure.

**JE:** From Rogers.

**DS:** Yes, right, from Will Rogers.

**JE:** Right.

**DS:** She was the winner of our contest. We had some local judges that came in and did a good job. And of course, the talent was a big factor in Miss America at that time, so it certainly was a big factor as far as our local judging was concerned.

Not too long after that they had the Miss Tulsa Contest and we sponsored her there.

Sure enough, she won that one and she—

**JE:** What does that mean, you sponsored her?



**DS:** What you do is you pay an entry fee of some sort and this is what sponsored did for the girls, maybe get some clothes or something. At that time, it might have been a hundred bucks, which bought maybe a swimsuit and a dress or something, hard to believe, but that's what it was. And I don't know what we spent on it but it wasn't a great amount of money and no sponsor did.

Then we had the contest down at the old Municipal Theater, which is now known as the Old Lady on Brady. She won that and then she was automatically entered then into the Miss Oklahoma Contest in Oklahoma City. She went on to pursue that little venture and she won the Miss Oklahoma Contest. Then went on to Atlantic City in September of '58, and ended up in the contest being the second runner-up, which is in effect, third place.

The winner of that contest was Mary Ann Mobley, which went on to do good things and had quite a career in the movies. I don't remember who was second.

But Anita finished third, and of course then, that's just about when her career started. She had a record that had come out about that time but it wasn't long after that, I think, she had records like "Paper Roses," "My Little Corner of the World," and the song from *Music Man*, "Till There Was You." I think that may have been her first big hit.

**JE:** You remember the songs that she might have song in your contest? Or—

**DS:** I have no idea.

**JE:** Right.

**DS:** I have no idea.

**JE:** Except you knew that she was blowing everybody away with that voice of hers.

**DS:** Well, she did, and her looks as well. She was a very attractive gal and she came across just dynamite. We felt real lucky, as far as the station was concerned, in order to be able to promote something like that about the station, and about the fact that this young lady had done so well. And of course, that just tied in, her being number one all over the state tied in with our being number one in Tulsa, as far as radio was concerned.

**JE:** Had you done other pageants for Miss KAKC?

**DS:** No.

**JE:** Was it—

**DS:** Never had gotten involved at all.

**JE:** Was it your promotional idea?

**DS:** I don't think it was my idea. It was probably one of our other people there who said, "You know, we ought to get into this thing. They're looking for sponsors." It may be that I had the thought that, "Well, maybe we ought to just have our own contest rather than just going in and laying out money for some girl we don't even know." I don't know for sure—

**JE:** So then—

**DS:** ...but I don't think the idea of our being involved was directly a sponsor. I will say this, the Tulsa Jaycees, of which I was a member at that time, also had a hand at sponsoring some of these pageants as well as an overall type of sponsor.

**JE:** Harry Clarke, I think, was very involved.

**DS:** Harry Clarke Jr. was a big factor in the Jaycees. Of course, they had a great clothing store here in Tulsa for many years until they sold out. Harry and his sister, Madge Clarke Wright, Madge just passed away but Harry's still kicking out there and he's a great friend of mine.

Harry's the one that got me involved with United Way and I'll always blame him or give him credit for that. It's been forty-five years, I guess now, since we've had something to do with that every year. But Harry is a great friend and Harry was also highly involved in the Tulsa Jaycees.

That's the story basically.

**JE:** Oh yeah.

**DS:** And there's one other little tidbit about that story that she got third place in that '58 contest and we felt like because of our involvement all the way through that somebody should go to cover the Miss America Pageant directly for KAKC. The obvious choice was me, so I did go in that year. I went out and did broadcasts from there. I spent about three days there. I think it was like the Thursday, Friday, and Saturday before the Saturday night televised finals.

So I went out to Atlantic City. I had to take a flight from here to Washington, and then had to take another little jumper flight from Washington to Atlantic City. We did the coverage on it and I got to interview some of the people, some of the gals. Got to talk to Bert Parks for just a brief moment.

We sent these things back and it worked out quite well and people seemed to be tuned into that because they were all following Anita. That was how that turned out, and she finished, as I said, second runner-up.

The next year, we sponsored another girl named Mary Ann Hazelton. Mary Ann won Miss KAKC, she won Miss Tulsa, and she won Miss Oklahoma. So here again, two years in a row, we hit number one with our sponsorship.

So then we decided, "Well, let's go cover it again," only this time we wanted to make it a little bit bigger coverage. And we had some other stations that we were aligned with in other parts of the country, as in Iowa, and I think there was one in Kentucky and maybe one in Kansas. They all wanted to be part of this little direct broadcast. So I would call up and do reports, just simple, little, thirty-second, one-minute reports to get something in about what's going on here in Atlantic City at the Miss America contest.

So I flew out there on a Monday and I was there the whole week. And then Anita showed up about Thursday, and I'd talked to her before she got there and I said, "Hey,

look, I'm going to be doing these broadcasts," and she was going to be performing on one of those shows, I'm not sure which one. It may have been that Saturday night, probably was because she'd had a couple of big records. So I said, "How about doing the broadcast with me?"

So she came down along the runway, and that's where I had a desk along the runway as a member of the press. She came down and we did several broadcasts together, those lasted a little longer, maybe two or three minutes. And she talked about her involvement and her relationship with the contestants for that year, and so forth. And so it worked out to be a good thing.

**JE:** But KAKC owned Anita Bryant.

**DS:** Well, in a sense you could say that, but we never made any big deal out of it except for that.

**JE:** Yeah, but it was funny.

**DS:** But you know one more thing? And I won't go any further than that, but the third year we had another girl in the Miss KAKC Contest, and her name is Mary Anne Bell and she won. She went on to Miss Tulsa and she won Miss Tulsa. I think she finished in the top five in Oklahoma City, but she didn't win that one. So I didn't go to Atlantic City anymore, not to cover anything else, at least.

**JE:** Was that the end of the KAKC contest?

**DS:** No, I think we had two out of three, that wasn't bad.

**JE:** Yeah, good.

**DS:** And actually, we considered it three out of three because Oklahoma City was a plus, it was gravy, you know, from the standpoint of going to Miss America. But the Miss KAKC and the Miss Tulsa Pageants for three straight years, you couldn't argue with that from the standpoint of success.

**JE:** No, that was excellent.

## **Chapter 14 - 3:38**

### **Radio Promos: Tony Randall**

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**John Erling:** Well, Dick, as long as we're reminiscing about people, we have Tony Randall, who, of course, went to New York and Broadway and actually came from Tulsa, Oklahoma.

**Dick Schmitz:** Right.

**JE:** And he went to school here.

**DS:** Went to Central High School.

**JE:** And you had him on your air at KAKC.

**DS:** He was in town for some function, I don't know what it was, it might have been connected with Central anniversary, it could have been for a show he was doing. I know he came to do the *Music Man* here in Tulsa one time. He's done other shows, but he happened to be in town and we thought, "Well, this might make for a nice quick interview, can we get one?"

So we called him to see if he would agree to do it and got hold of him and he said, "Oh, sure."

So we were just going to go out there and send one of the news guys out in the mobile unit to talk to him. He said, "I'll just come up there."

"Really?" We thought, "Okay, this is great. We won't be recording something, he'll just come right up and he'll be on the air with us for a few minutes and that was it."

So he came up, got there a little bit before noon. We were just finishing that particular hour's format, which was, as we called it, "news alive at fifty-five." We did the newscast; Clayton Vaughn may have been doing that newscast.

And then the fellow that came on between twelve and three in the afternoon was a fellow by the name of Don Kelly. His program was known as "Kelly and Chauncey." And he had this make believe character named Chauncey that he talked to all the time, they talked back and forth, but it was just one person doing all the talking with two different voices—a regular voice and a made up voice.

Don's theme came on at twelve noon, and he talked over it and got into the first record. And as soon as he got out of the record, he said, "Well, today we're going to have a special guest come in and visit with us." Then he started this chatter going back and forth with his character Chauncey. He said, "What do you think about Tony Randall, Chauncey?"

"Oh, I just love Tony Randall."

So they're going back and forth—this is the show we're going to have Tony just talk to Don for a few minutes on and then that would be it. We were going to put in another room right next to us that was visually there, they could see each other. But Tony says, "I don't want to go in there, I want to be right here."

And we had a space that was about maybe three and a half to four feet wide that the announcer, the disc jockey sat in. And he says, "Get me a chair."

So somebody went and got him a chair, and he came in and he crowded right in right next to Don. And the two of them are sitting in this little space. They're using the same microphone. Tony starts talking to Don and then Chauncey says something, which is again Don talking. And Chauncey and Tony start talking back and forth and it's like any other radio station that's successful, we might have had twenty commercials or maybe more to run during that fifty-five-minute period between 12:05 and the next newscast at 12:55. And then we had headlines in the middle, we had a weathercast that had to be in there a

couple of times and some other features that we would normally do during an hour.

We didn't do any of that. None of the commercials ran. None of the headlines ran. Tony and Don and Chauncey talked for fifty minutes and it was an hysterical hour, you might say. Just unbelievably funny. And every time one of them would say something, Tony would react. Or Tony would say something and Chauncey would react. And Don was almost like the guy in the middle, because it became more of a Chauncey/Tony thing before the whole thing was all over.

We did get a lot of interesting things from Tony but it was all fun and it was the most fun hour I think I ever spent just listening to something. Unfortunately, we didn't record a word of it. But it was a great time and Tony was very gracious to be there.

But, boy, when he said, "I don't want to go in there, I want to be in here. Get me a chair," we got him a chair. It was great.

**JE:** Yeah. I talked to him in studio and by phone several times, as a matter of fact.

**DS:** Boy, he was fun.

**JE:** Tony was always, I think, partial to Tulsa and would respond to the media here. I liked that about him.

**DS:** He certainly did to us.

**JE:** Yeah.

## Chapter 15 - 5:58

### KAKC News

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**John Erling:** So we're talking '58, '60, '62, '63, a little bit about news events because KAKC was not only dominant with music but people got their news from KAKC as well.

**Dick Schmitz:** Yeah.

**JE:** I mean, you had a lock on both entities, didn't you, at that time?

**DS:** We did.

**JE:** Even though at KVOO or KRMG probably tried to play the news game they didn't have that image that you people had at that time.

**DS:** Right. We had an image, this is not in any way to belittle their operation, we just had the type of image that quick on, quick off. We would have headlines on the half hour. We would have "news alive at fifty-five" five minutes, usually had a commercial in the middle of it, so if there was any news, there might have been three and a half minutes, you know. By the time we got through with our slam-bang intro and closing, got the commercial in or two, and then did some news.

But KAKC was really the headline station, you might say. And when it necessitated going into more detail, we would.

When Clayton took over as the news director he got a little more involved in giving more detail and covering more stories that might be of significance to the people, but they weren't of high interest. He would cover a story originating in the courthouse and going into more detail. But that wasn't really what people wanted to hear, at that point. And we gave news more often. Most of the stations like KRMG or KVOO, they might have news every hour but they might also have it just at noon and at six o'clock or five o'clock, and so people had to wait and wait.

Whereas with KAKC, you know, it could be any moment in any hour that a mobile newsman could break in and give a bulletin or give a story or tell, like I did, that there was a fire at this school out here, see?

**JE:** So you had truly breaking news? We hear that a lot today on television.

**DS:** Oh, yeah, yeah.

**JE:** You had breaking news and scheduled newscasts in an hour, so you dominated the market with that. So news events. I'm thinking about segregation and that back in the '50s. Was that an issue?

**DS:** [laughing] I have to tell you this little story about Clayton. We never let him live this down but it was sort of a thing that came into play. When he was running the news department he was very cognizant of this black/white relationship and did not want in any way to continue this matter of segregation. He didn't feel like we needed to say that it was this color person or that color person.

But one day he was doing a story on a young fellow that had been injured in a car accident. And he was black. It was at the time where we were transitioning to use the word *black* instead of *Negro*. It was just sort of going away. And Clayton got mixed up when he was doing this report and said, "Well, the word here from St. John's is that this young man, twenty-three years old, a black Negro—" then he went right on with whatever he was going to say.

But we never let him live that down. And I had a couple of friends of mine who were black and they happened to hear that story. Now they took it the right way. But Clayton was trying to do the right thing, he was trying to transition to black, but you can't just do that overnight. You should, but then again, he was wanting to get away from any identification.

You don't go out and say a twenty-three-year-old white man, why would you go out and say a twenty-three-year-old black man?

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative), oh, yeah.

**DS:** And we got away from that, I think.

**JE:** Yeah. I think in Oklahoma City we have Clara Luper who led the sit-in at the lunch counter, which spread throughout the country. That was back in about this time period. Any events that might have happened here? Because downtown blacks were not welcome to many of these stores or the downtown area that you've just talked about. Do you have any recollection of that?

**DS:** You know, I honestly don't have a big thought about that, I just don't. We never had a problem. I'd heard about the Race Riot ever since I moved to Tulsa, heard about it from my grandfather before I moved to Tulsa. But for some reason, it never crossed my mind that there was a problem with black/white relations, in terms of any kind of trouble.

I'm sure there was trouble, but when I was a disc jockey here, program director, some of the biggest stars were people like Frogman Henry. We had a couple of black nightclubs in North Tulsa called the Rose Room and the Big Tin Ballroom. And I never had a problem. I went up there several times to hear certain groups play.

Lloyd Price was a big star, had a big record called "Personality," and "Stagger Lee," and a number of others. I'd met Lloyd at a Miami disc jockey convention in '59, and when he came to Tulsa to play at either the Rose Room or the Big Tin, I went up there.

A fellow by the name of John Sharvid, who is a sports information director at TU before he headed up Zebco. John and I were friends and we went up there to see Lloyd. In fact, we walked in the door, we were the only white people in the room. And there was probably three hundred people in that ballroom. They didn't pay much attention to us. We were there, but when he had been up there performing, then I said, "Can I go back and see Lloyd? Can we go back and say hello to him?" Because I'd met him down in Miami and he knew we'd been playing his records.

And so, "What's your name?"

I told him, and I said, "Tell him I'm with KAKC radio."

And so they went back and pretty soon the guy came out and he said, "Come on back."

So we went back to the dressing room and walked in there. You know, his band and he were just standing there getting a drink and ready to come back out and do the next show. He was just as kind and courteous as could be. We just said, "Hello, how you doing? Glad to see you," and I introduced him to John, and we walked out, went back out and watched the rest of the show. And he came back and did the show and that was it.

I never gave any thought to going up in the "black" community. I never had a problem. And I don't remember any great problems here in Tulsa. I'm sure there were, I'm sure there was a lot of discrimination going on, but KAKC didn't get in the middle of it and we made it a point not to.

**JE:** Yeah.

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**Chapter 16 - 1:52****Weather Stories**

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**John Erling:** Any weather events that were big that you covered? Tornadoes?

**Dick Schmitz:** Well, yeah, I've been in a boat at 71st and Lewis before. That whole area used to flood out there where the Marriott is now, the Kensington Center where TV Guide is now. All that whole area on south of there, underwater. The whole area around 61st and Lewis. Across from Southern Hills, north of there, that whole area was underwater. I've been in boats in both those areas during the floods of '57 and '59.

That was before we had Keystone and before we had everything under control with the river. Even now, you know, the thing can get up top of the hill, you might say.

One of my kids was living in an apartment complex over on Riverside Drive back in, I think it was, '84. I think that was the year that we had another almost flood, enough that it did come over Riverside Drive in certain places. But we went over and took his furniture that he had and stacked it up and walked away. It never got up that far, fortunately, but you didn't know whether it was going to do that or not.

But yeah, that was definitely some weather related events. And of course, the tornadoes. We had a tornado come through here in South Tulsa through Brookside, right straight down Peoria, and knocked out Shakey's Pizza Parlor.

I had a friend of one of my sons, he was in the pizza parlor at the time, it was called Shakey's. And they had giant wooden tables where people would get their pizza and go sit down at these wooden tables and eat.

The manager of the pizza parlor happened to look outside and he said, "Everybody on the floor under the tables! Under the tables!"

And so David and his friends all just thought he was kidding for a while, and then they said, "I mean it! Get under the tables! The storm is coming."

They got under the tables and it just ripped the roof off of that thing. And these guys were all under these big wooden tables and all of them safe. Thank goodness for that guy looking out the window at the right time.

Of course, it just devastated South Peoria from that point on. And that pizza parlor is where Best Hardware is now, I think, right across from KJRH. AT that time, it was KVOO.



**Chapter 17 - 4:07****KELI**

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**John Erling:** By the way, we talk about KAKC, what do those call letters stand for?

**Dick Schmitz:** Well, they were started back in the mid '40s by Sam Avey, Raymond King, and Glen Condon, who was also a well-known iconic newsman for KRMG. And that's what it stands for, Avey, King, and Condon.

**JE:** Raymond would be the father of Sharon King Davis.

**DS:** That's right. And Sam Avey, I think, is her grandfather. But I'm not sure of that.

**JE:** Okay.

**DS:** Sam Avey owned the Coliseum, which, sadly, burned in the early '50s. It was an iconic building as well, and I went to see many hockey games and wrestling matches with my grandfather, who just lived right down the street north of there on the 300 block on Elgin in an apartment building. One set of grandparents lived there, and so whenever I'd come to visit Tulsa, he'd always be sure we went to see a wrestling match. And if it happened to be in the winter, we'd go see a hockey game. That was a fun, fun place to go and just a marvelous venue.

**JE:** With KAKC dominating for so many years, and number one, all the years that you were there—

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

**JE:** ...when did it begin to fall off?

**DS:** Well, KELI was another rock station that came into town. They had a better signal, for one thing, and they made some pretty significant inroads into KAKC in the late '60s, and maybe early '70s. That in the late '60s, a couple of years after I was gone, they elected to hire a programming consultant named Bill Drake, out of California.

He came in and he completed modified things. I think he took them back to a top forty format. And, honest to goodness, I just don't know what happened with the ratings or why. I do know though that they suffered some decline, in so far as listenership was concerned. One reason that the decline occurred was because of the emergence of FM, FM stations playing pop music or rock and roll, in some cases.

Whereas we had one or two stations back in the '50s, by the end of the '60s, there were several FM stations, none of which were really dominant yet because they really hadn't perfected FM for the cars. But everybody knew that once they could get FM in the cars that was where it could really take off, because of the quality of the signal, and so forth.

And that's exactly what happened. Throughout the early '70s, mid '70s, into the '80s, FM just boomed.

KRMG was always a good station, they were always a good news station. They had good people there, they had Condon was there, then they had Rock Smith, a number of really topflight news people and a good news department, as far as I was concerned. And they were always good competition for us, in so far as the news, but more so in a detailed newscast as opposed to a headline type newscast.

And KVOO also did their bit too. KVOO really relied on NBC though, which was their network, up until the time they switched over to a country format.

**JE:** Well, KELI, known as Kelly—

**DS:** Yeah?

**JE:** Were you rocking back and forth against them at the same time? Your jocks against their jocks?

**DS:** Oh, yeah, yeah. They got started in the early '60s. But we had some good friends over there. Joe Henderson was the program director and he just passed away recently, and I'm sorry about that because he and I got to be good friends. And his daughter is a wonderful announcer, we use her frequently on commercials here in town.

Joe headed up a staff over there. They sort of took an approach that they really got the name across. Everybody on the staff was named Keli. I think there was Joe Keli, John Keli, well, they didn't name Don Keli because we had a Don Kelly on our staff. But everyone they gave the name of Keli, spelled Keli, you know.

Well, they did eventually start using their own names, but that was after, I think, a couple of years. So they did make inroads, simply because they had five thousand watts, as I recall, as opposed to our thousand. And I don't know what their signal was at night, probably a little less, but ours was five hundred. And like I said, it couldn't get to Bartlesville, in the first place, and barely got out of Sand Springs. So that was tough on us.

**JE:** So did they ever overtake you, KELI and—

**DS:** Not while I was there.

**JE:** Yeah.

**DS:** That doesn't mean that they didn't because I was there, it just means that they didn't while I was there and I don't think they did for probably at least another year or so. And I can't honestly say that their ratings ever surpassed those of KAKC at any time. They may very well have in the late '60s or early '70s, but I don't know.

**Chapter 18 - 12:37****Pres. John F. Kennedy**

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**John Erling:** Very young president of the United States, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, would make appearances in our state. And you did some news coverage there?

**Dick Schmitz:** Well, in a way, yeah, of course, whenever he came to Oklahoma. But I had three different occasions with Kennedy. The first one, and this is going back now, the first occasion I had was when I was on a news team that we set up to cover the 1956 election that was between Adlai Stevenson and Dwight Eisenhower. Eisenhower was running for reelection in '56, his vice president was Richard Nixon.

Adlai Stevenson had run against him in '52, he was the governor of Illinois. He lost in '52. He came back, got the nomination for the Democrats again in '56, and ran against him again.

And his running mate at that time ended up being Estes Kefauver, a senator from Tennessee. But Kefauver had a major battle at the Democratic convention with a fellow from Massachusetts named John Kennedy, who was a senator at that time.

When Kefauver and Stevenson lost the election '56, Kennedy was immediately on the road to the presidency. In fact, it started before then but it wasn't as obvious as it was the day after the election in November.

Some time in that time frame, the winter of '57, it was shortly before I left to come to Tulsa, but I'm going to say it could have happened in late November, December, January, or February of '56-'57, he made a speaking engagement in Champaign or Banner.

I had been pushing our station in Champaign, which mainly relied on *CBS News* to do more local news coverage. So we covered things like the Hungarian Revolt, when they brought a bunch of Hungarian refugees to Champaign or Banner and housed them there. We covered things like the Fluoride Debates, which were going on all over the country.

An engineer and I usually went out to do these remote broadcasts to cover this stuff. They'd never done this before. That's how I sort of got into news, you might say, while I was still at school at the university. The newspaper, by the way, owned our radio station, the *News Gazette*.

So I saw in the paper that Kennedy was going to make a speaking engagement in Champaign or Banner, one of the two, probably at the university. So I thought, "We ought to go out and cover him because this guy is going to be running. He is running for president right now." I mean, Kefauver was done, Stevenson was done, there was nobody else on the horizon and he almost got the vice presidential nomination, which would have been a disaster for him, I think. Had Stevenson won, I think it would have been a bad thing.

But nonetheless, I said, "We've got to cover it."

So Larry Stewart, our general manager, said, "Okay, get it set up. You and Meryl go out and cover it." Meryl's the engineer, he carries the equipment; I'm the broadcast star. And you know that, John.

But anyway, we went out to this little airport in Champaign. I think it was a university sort of owned or supported airstrip. We set up and it was cold, believe me, it was so darn cold you couldn't believe it. And of course, winters on the plains of Illinois really can get a little bit ugly. But it was cold, fortunately, it wasn't raining or snowing.

So we went out to the airport. We got there about an hour ahead of time. Wasn't sure when the plane was coming in but we had a general idea. So we set up our equipment. There was a little house, maybe twice as big as the studio we're sitting in right now, that there was nobody in at the time. So we drove the station wagon, got permission to go onto the tarmac. We had a portable generator, we plugged in all the equipment, we were ready to go, just like you did when you came over here, we're ready to record, got a tape recorder, ready to roll. Tested everything, it was all working great. And I got extra long mic cords like a hundred or two hundred feet of mic cord so I could out and go wherever he was going to go.

I just wanted to ask him two or three questions because I figured I couldn't keep him for very long. And nobody else was there at the time we arrived.

A little plane comes in, taxis up to where we are. He gets off the plane, steps off the wing, then steps down onto the ground. Just his suit, no overcoat, has a briefcase in his hand. And he walks over toward me and he sees me with a microphone and I said, "Senator, I wonder if I could just have a couple of questions with you?"

He said, "Yeah, that'd be fine." He said, "Let's go inside where it's warm."

And I thought, "Oh, boy, go inside where it's warm." Well, I knew I had enough mic cord to get through that door and the engineer didn't have to move the station wagon. But what I wasn't expecting was when I walk over to go through that door the place was packed. There were probably 150 people in there at the time. Many of them reporters.

And I'm dead. I'm thinking, "Oh, my gosh." I told Meryl, I said, "I'm never going to get anything." 'Cause when I walked in, I walked in the door at the back of the room. If you can envision the room being a rectangle. Kennedy walks in and he goes right up to the front of the room, the door where I came from off the tarmac was in the back far left. And I walk in, there's no way in the world I'm going to get to the front of the room. I walk across the back of the room, I'm right up against the wall, I'm standing, I got as far to the center as I could.

And so I'm thinking, "This is a waste of time." 'Cause he didn't wait for me at all, he went right on up to the rostrum.

Whoever was hosting him got up, introduced him, and said, "Now the senator will take a few questions here if anybody wants to ask anything, that would be fine. He'd be glad to talk to you but he's going to have to get on the road because he's got this luncheon engagement."

So Kennedy gets up, get a little bit of a hand from the people in the crowd. As I said, most of them press, and they're not big on applauding. But anyway, he got a hand. He said, "Okay, I'd be glad to take a few questions. And I want to start with that young man right back there."

And I'm standing in the back of the room, I almost fell over.

He said, "What do you got?"

And I said, "Well," and I asked him two questions. And he answered the first one—I wish I could remember what they were. Then I asked him another one. I had a third one but I wasn't going to press my luck. I asked him a second one.

He answered that one.

All these people are standing there and as soon as he points to me they turn around and look at him, "Oh, who is he? What is he doing here?"

Well, I was the guy that set up on the tarmac in twenty degree weather. And he said, "Let's go inside and I'll talk to you." And he gave me the first two questions.

We got them recorded, come back to the station, and the station manager says, "How did you get those?"

I told him the story and that's exactly what happened. I had a great respect for Kennedy at that time for what he did.

**JE:** I'm thinking, if you stood behind there with that microphone, how did you get your microphone out to him?

**DS:** I didn't have to because, fortunately, they had a decent PA system. I just held it up and the PA system carried it out to me.

**JE:** And that was good enough quality?

**DS:** It—it—it was good enough for what we were doing.

**JE:** That was very nice of him.

**DS:** But another quick story was done here in Tulsa, where he was in the process of campaigning. And he came to take an overview of Northeast Oklahoma and the lakes area, at the invitation of Senator Monroney and Senator Kerr.

So he came in, and we had a new governor, Howard Edmondson, and American Airlines offered an airplane, which could hold about sixty, seventy people. I guess, that's just a guess on my part, but it was a regular airliner, two-motor airliner. So they offered that and then they invited some of the press to go along with it.

Well, you had all your political bigwigs. You had Senator Kennedy, you had the two other senators, Monroney, and you had Kerr, you had the governor, you had the lieutenant

governor. George Nye, I think, may have been lieutenant governor at that time. And the list goes on and on about all these different people that were getting on this airplane.

And I'd gotten acquainted with a reporter at the newspaper named Troy Gordon, who was just a wonderful columnist, wrote funny, funny, great articles. He and his wife both did. And I got acquainted with Troy, so we're standing back.

And then they said, "Now we'll take the press, and the press can go on. Just find a seat somewhere."

Troy and I are at the very back of the line, so we're getting ready to walk up the steps, you had to walk out on the tarmac and walk up the steps. So we're walking up the steps and I looked at Troy and he looked at me and I said, "Boy, I'll tell you, this would be a mess if this thing went down, wouldn't it?" Or something to that effect, you know, I was just speculating on the plane crashing.

And he said, "Yeah, I can see the paper now. 'Also on board.' "

[both laughing] And I thought that was one of the greatest lines.

**JE:** Yeah.

**DS:** But he had such a great sense of humor. And that was the perfect line for "Also on board."

The other story about Kennedy was when he came to visit Robert Kerr, the senator, near Poteau, in a place called Big Cedar. He came in on a helicopter, and Harry Wilson, the newsman, and Clayton Vaughn, the newsman, we were all working at KAKC at the time, and we had this guy that was a friend of ours who was a pilot. He said, "Let's fly down there and see Kennedy come in."

We went out and got in his plane out at the airport and flew down there. Got lost on the way. He saw a windsock on a barn as we were going down there and he landed on this field, pulled up over to this barn and there's a farmer standing there next to a hay wagon. He said, "What do you guys want?" [laughing]

And the pilot said, "Tell me which way is Poteau."

"Hnn [pausing sound], it's that way about forty miles."

"Okay, thanks," and said, "I'll find it." So he got back in the plane, turned around, took off, taking off into the wind he didn't see this big bar ditch right in the middle of this field, and we came off of that thing in a big hurry as soon as that ditch showed up that he hadn't seen when he came in and landed.

So we got back up in the air, got down to Poteau, he landed, got in a car, and drove out to this intersection, which was the marrying of two roads. They'd built these roads and I don't know what purpose it served, but it was a lovely big intersection and they were going to dedicate this highway. That's what Kennedy was there for as a guest of Kerr. All the same people were there, Edmondson, and all the senators, and the governors, everybody was down there and it was a great time.

And I took some fantastic pictures that you've seen of Senator Kennedy and, or President Kennedy at that time. He was the president. The first two times he was only a senator. But they were marvelous and you could see how close I was to him. I probably wasn't any further away from him than I am from you right now, maybe four or five feet.

And yet, no wonder somebody from long distance put a bullet through him. At that time, anybody in that group, anybody in that crowd could have done something so horrible. I mean, really, it was just amazing at the lack—hey, he had the Secret Service there, but where were they? You didn't see them in any of our pictures that I had.

**JE:** And that year would have been?

**DS:** That year would have been in October of '61, two years before.

**JE:** 'Sixty-three then, of course.

**DS:** Yeah.

**JE:** November he was assassinated.

**DS:** Yeah. I wasn't in a single picture, by the way. I took all the pictures of Clayton and Harry and the senator and all the other dignitaries and nobody bothered to take a picture of me.

**JE:** Did you or Clayton or anybody get to ask him a question?

**DS:** No.

**JE:** Or get up close to him?

**DS:** No, they wouldn't allow any of that, uh-uh (negative).

**JE:** But that was quite a congregation of everybody.

**DS:** It was. And then after they got through, Kennedy is walking off the platform, he is almost to the ground. And somebody remembered they hadn't dedicated the highway. So he had to come back up and read something that they gave him to read, 'cause it'd been funded by federal funds, to a great extent.

**JE:** And that's the reason he was there.

**DS:** That's the reason he was there. It really wasn't the reason he was there. He was there to have a good time at Senator Kerr's ranch, which is where he went out and spent the night.

I don't know where Air Force One was, but he came in on a helicopter. In fact, I have a shot of the helicopter right before it landed and there was more than one helicopter there too, I think. So probably that was press and Secret Service.

**JE:** And it shows you the strength and the power of Senator Robert Kerr, because it was because of *him* that the president of the United States came in.

**DS:** Exactly.

**JE:** And he probably was the most powerful senator we've ever had.

**DS:** There was one other factor that plays into that, now that you've brought it up. And that was Howard Edmondson from almost the very beginning of Kennedy's campaign was a

major supporter. In fact, he was one of the few Democrats in this state that was really, really wound up with Kennedy.

And an interesting sidebar to that, when Senator Kerr died, Edmondson resigned. This was thought out quite a ways ahead of time. Edmondson resigned, George Nye would succeed into the governorship for about a month, as I recall. And then he would appoint Edmondson as the replacement senator for Kerr to fulfill the rest of his term.

Now a lot of people had a lot of problems with that, for some reason. “Well, why is he doing that? You know, what business does he have going to Washington?”

Well, what business he had in Washington was, he was close to Kennedy, and Kennedy was the president. Had Kennedy not died, when Edmondson ran for the senate job again, I think in '64, Kennedy would have been here to campaign for him and may have let him win the—as it was, he lost out on the Democratic nomination to Fred Harris.

But that was the best move that could have been made in my political opinion, that Edmondson went to Washington.

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

## Chapter 19 - 4:41

### Johnny Martin

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**John Erling:** Eventually you left KAKC, along about 1966, right?

**Dick Schmitz:** And I went to join KARV and KFMJ, which KARV had just bought. KARV was owned by the Kravis Organization that was managed by one of my closest friends, Carl Smith, who passed away here a couple of years ago.

Carl, when I left KAKC, was trying to get me to come over there. And strangely enough, Joe Henderson at KELI was trying to get me to come there. That was one of those things where we'd been fighting the war and you just couldn't go over and join the other side.

Joe offered me more money than Carl did. But it wasn't a matter of money, it was a matter of pride, and it was a matter that I couldn't, I just couldn't do that. I couldn't do that.

As it turned out, I was just an insignificant piece of that whole KAKC puzzle. Everybody that ever left KAKC and tried to go on the air someplace else, and I was included for about a brief period of time when I got to KARV. Carl asked me to go on the air for three or four months.

I succeeded in taking their rating from a 3.1 down to a 1.8 on the rating survey. But everybody that left there never had any success whatsoever with making it big, like they were at KAKC, on another radio station. It just didn't happen. It was the station and not



the people. If you weren't a good radio personality, of course, then you might not do so well at KAKC. In that case, then you left.

**JE:** When you were in your heyday and those people that you named at KAKC, you were real stars in town. I mean, isn't that true? You were—

**DS:** Well, a lot of people thought that, you know. We would attract attention when we'd go out if they knew what we looked like. But that's the beauty of radio, sometimes.

**JE:** Right.

**DS:** But, yeah, and people would recognize your name, and so forth, especially if it was Scooter Segraves, you know. Not so much Dick Schmitz, but I appreciate the acknowledgments that we got and it was good for the radio station.

**JE:** On KRMG at night it was Johnny Martin.

**DS:** Yeah!

**JE:** Johnny Martin Days.

**DS:** I got to know Johnny after I left there and we set up our studio. In fact, he has been in this room to record numerous times. I love to have him come in here because he's just such a character, number one.

And number two, what a great voice and great delivery. We didn't get to be super close friends, nothing like what you had. But he came over here several times to record things for me. And, oh, he was just a delight to deal with and work with.

I don't know that we ever crossed paths from the standpoint of competition.

**JE:** Um-hmm (affirmative). Okay. But we remember him with his "Case Night in the City."

**DS:** Oh, my gosh, I used to listen to that all the time. And he always played Henry Mancini's theme from *Casablanca*, da-dut-da-da-da-da, [sung musically] that's one of my favorite songs.

**JE:** So that was after you had done your KAKC.

**DS:** Yeah.

**JE:** And then you went to KARV. And to my knowledge, KARV FM was the FM that really began to grow and establish in the minds of Tulsans that FM was here.

**DS:** It did and the real growth came several years after I left. Here is sort of how it was because when I went to KARV in '66, that's when I started doing Irving Productions. And it turned out that after three years, it would have been '69, I was going to leave because the production work was just eating me up.

We had so much going on and I had this little one-room studio that Carl had rented for us down in the, on the sixteenth floor of the First National building. They were up on the nineteenth floor. The station.

So I was going to separate from them. I told Carl I really thought I needed to move and I'd like to buy some of this equipment if they weren't going to use it.

He said, "Well, could you do me a favor? Could you just hang on a little while longer?" He said, "I think your production work is getting attention for the radio station."

Carl was the manager at that time. He later left KARV and wasn't there in the early '70s, then came back. And that's where he really put things together for George Kravis. But Carl asked me to hand on for a while longer.

And so I agreed to stay. What we did was, if they came in to do spots with us at Irving, then we would give them a break on the production, and sometimes did it for nothing, if they would buy a schedule on KARV.

So that got some attention, and that as a result, got some client business returning because they had some success by using KARV. But that was really minimal so far as getting attention.

And after another year, I just couldn't, in fairness to Carl and to George, stay on any longer. They agreed and we separated and I took Irving in August of '70 and incorporated and started our own business full time.

**JE:** What was your job at KARV?

**DS:** I was hired as like a operations type person. Really I was hired in sales, you might say. I was actually doing some sales work. I was not on the air and didn't want to be on the air. While I was doing the sales work I was also involved with doing the production.

## Chapter 20 - 7:00

### Irving Productions

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**John Erling:** Dick, now, of course, you have your production company and you named it Irving Productions. It could have been named Schmitz. Your name was familiar in this town, why did you choose Irving?

**Dick Schmitz:** Well, I had been fortunate in having a name that had some exposure here for eight years or so from '57 until '66, almost nine years. It happened that when I left KAKC in March of '66, a great mentor of mine named Don Mitchell, who was an adman here in town, worked for Watts, Payne-Advertising and later just shortly after that formed a company called Advertising Incorporated with four other partners.

Don Mitchell was the man I probably owe most to from the standpoint of being able to really get in and delve into advertising in that phase of my career. But he said, "I'm getting ready to do something different. I'm going to be leaving Watts, Payne-Advertising." And he said, "Last year we did about a half a season of producing a show called *The Glenn Dobbs Show*."

Glenn Dobbs was the TU football coach and athletic director in the mid '60s. They were so successful at beating OSU and they'd beaten so many other teams and they were leading the nation in their passing attack. And they had Howard Twilley and they had Billy Anderson and Jerry Rome and all these great players that were getting national recognition.

He said, "We did about four or five of the shows at the end of the season last year because it was such a hyped up deal. So many victories." He said, "I've got that all set up to be on Channel 8. But I can't take anything with me. When I leave Watts, Payne and set up this other company I cannot take anything, any clients." Of course, he ended up getting them, but I mean, the point was, he couldn't take any of them with him. And he said, "And there's nobody at Watts, Payne that would know what to do with producing this show."

Don had already, by the way, hired me to start producing Otasco commercials, and even doing more of the voice work for Otasco at that time. That's how we'd gotten acquainted. So he said, "Do you think you could do it?"

And I said, "Well, I know Glenn, because I'd known him with promotions that KAKC had done at TU, promoting the games and different things out at the stadium.

I said, "I would love to try it."

He said, "Well, let me set up lunch with Glenn and we'll see what he says."

So we set up lunch with Glenn, he said, "I'd love to have that, that'd be great."

So I said, "Okay, I'll take it over for this year, which will still be at Channel 8." As soon as I found out the details about the program at Channel 8, I decided right then and there, this was either going to be the last year I did this or I was going to move the show and change the entire format.

Envision this: This was a football show using nothing but black and white footage, shot from the very top of the booth in the stadium. Now the stadium had not been enlarged at that point. It was being enlarged, I guess that's what it was. And it was shot by an old guy that had done it forever. It was shot with one camera, total wide angle because it was literally the game evaluation film that Dobbs used all week long to go back in and he could see every player on the field and everything that they were doing or not doing. As a result, that was the footage I had to use.

And I would show up out of Channel 8. Now get this, this show ran between eight and eight thirty on Sunday morning after the football game on Saturday afternoon or Saturday night. So it had to be put together, edited, strung together, and then get Glenn to say a few things so that we could sort of tie all the pieces together, because you couldn't show the whole game. Using that footage, and yet, it was all sold. Don Mitchell had already sold that show.

So I just took over as the producer and Don left Watts, Payne and went to set up his other company. That's how it happened. And so I just simply decided that from that point

on, if I was going to be involved I was going to move it. So I started shopping around to the other two stations here in town. KJRH, which at that time was KVOO TV, decided right away they'd like to have the show.

My recollection is that they gave me an hour, which I had to then go sell, an hour show on Sunday afternoon and it was either from four to five or five to six, which wasn't a bad time to have a football show. And we would shoot it in color. They were the only, as I recall, the full-color station here in town.

So as a result, I hired their main cameraman, a guy named Jim Abbott, out at Channel 2. And they didn't have another guy that I really was comfortable with. I knew Red Statum, a fellow named Red Statum, who was a cameraman, news guy out at Channel 8. So I said, "Can you freelance?"

He said, "Yeah."

And I said, "Do you want to shoot the other camera?" Because I wanted two cameras; one up in the booth with Jim shooting the stuff, but mainly shooting it for our broadcast. I didn't care about whether Dobbs saw all the players or not, see, I wanted to show the plays.

And then I asked Red, "How about you shooting it from the ground?"

You didn't need to hear all that, I apologize for that, but to answer your question, "How did Irving come to be?" The agency, which was still Watts, Payne, handling all accounts that were sponsoring the show, said, "Well, we need to sign you up as the producer of the show. What's the name of your company?"

I said, "Um, well, I don't have a company."

He said, "Well, we just need to call it anything, we need to put it on the contracts who we're dealing with." They said, "Well, why don't we just call it Dick Schmitz Productions?"

And I said, "Just give me a day to think about that."

So I thought about it some more and I talked to Alma and I talked to Don, again, my mentor. And he said, "Well, that'd be all right. You could call it that."

At the time that we were making that decision there was record out called "The Ballad of Irving: The 142nd Fastest Gun in the West," was done by Frank Gallup, who was the old announcer for the old *Perry Como* television show. And it was one of the funniest records, maybe *the* funniest record I've ever heard.

We laughed about that, we probably played that thing for each other, Don and I did, every day, or at least a couple of times a week. It was just hysterical and we'd laugh and laugh. I said, "Let's just call it Irving Productions: The 142nd Fastest Production Company in the City of Tulsa."

He said, "Well, you can call it that."

So I said, "I'm going to try that." And I said, "You know, the more I thought about Dick Schmitz Productions the more I thought, 'My gosh, if this thing goes down in flames, I

don't want to go with it." Because I was already thinking about starting up the production company to do more than just Otasco's spots and things of that nature.

So, sure enough, that's what we did. We called it Irving Productions.

And then a friend of mine, who was a graphic artist out on 15th Street, a fellow named Frank Andrews, said, "Let me make you some letterhead and I'll do a logo for you."

Well, you pay for those things. I said, "Well, I can't afford to do it, I'm just getting started."

He said, "That's all right, let me see what I can do."

He hired a graphics guy that he used, who was a mechanic at American Airlines, to do this logo that I have, which is painted on my wall out here in front. It's been there almost from day one when we moved out here in the mid '70s, or late '70s, when my son painted that on the wall.

And the logo has been the same ever since. The only thing we did from the logo he gave us, which had the gun at the end, we pulled the flag out of it and said, "Productions, Inc.," on the flag. That's how Irving Productions came to be. It's a funny name and people are going to remember it a lot easier than they could Dick Schmitz.

## Chapter 21 - 7:10

### Irving Clients

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**John Erling:** So then Irving Productions really gets started in 1970. Some people might remember some of the clients that you represented, like Otasco.

**Dick Schmitz:** Right.

**JE:** Can you talk about that relationship? First of all, Otasco stood for something.

**DS:** Oklahoma Tire and Supply Company. They'd been around for many, many years. Don Mitchell, who was the account supervisor for the agency, which handled Otasco. First Watts, Payne-Advertising, and then later, Advertising Incorporated. Don was one of my biggest boosters and supporters and kept encouraging me all along to get into this production business, get into it full time, because he was going to give me all the business for doing the Otasco commercials. He liked what I did.

They had people audition to be the Otasco man. "I'm your Otasco man." So they decided they wanted two. They picked a fellow named Ward Kane, who was an announcer at Channel 8, to do Otasco commercials for home goods, like refrigerators and TVs and anything else inside the store.

Whereas they picked me to do the tires and batteries type spots.

Well, Ward did that for about a year, year and a half, maybe two, and I did the other. And then Ward moved to Ohio someplace, Cincinnati, I think. So then Don said, "Well, why you just do all of them?"

So on the regular basis, I would do all of the one-voice commercials, and we produced four or five commercials a week for years.

Then about every quarter or so, they would do a sale called a Blitz. And that's where they would do ten spots that would run in practically every market that Otasco was in. The regular schedules didn't run in every market, but the Blitz schedules did. And they just really bought the time and did great work.

Otasco had a signature that had been started back in the '40s, I think, somebody saying, "Thank you, here's your change. Remember you always save at your friendly Otasco store." The guy that did the original recorded version that was used for a long time until I got involved was a fellow named Frank Simms, who was a great announcer out at KVOO. Because that's where they used to produce the spots.

Jack Moore and Mel Billington, I worked with them and they're both gone. They were great to work with. But yet, Don kept saying, "You need to set up your own business."

I said, "Okay, I'll see what I can do." Well, that's when I was going to try to do that in '69, when Carl asked me to hang on another year.

Well, finally in '70, I did, and we set up the business of doing that stuff. So then he had me start doing the Otasco signatures, which were, "Thank you, here's your change. Remember you always save at your friendly Otasco store." And sometimes we'd tail it on out, "Oklahoma Tire and Supply," sometimes.

And then they bought two small chains called McCurry and McClellan, in Oklahoma. They were franchise stores, I think. So we had to do the same ten spots for Otasco, McCurry-McClellan. Those Blitz spots were two- or three-voice spots, we did ten of them. And the people I used on them practically all the time, great guys, great announcers. One is gone now, Vic Bastion. He passed away two or three years ago. Then Gary Chew, Gary Chew lives out in California now.

Gary, Vic, and I would get together some days and spend two hours just screaming at each other with these two-voice spots for Otasco. So that's my story on Otasco.

And finally, they changed agencies in the early '80s, that left us out in the cold, sadly. I've always had a sense that their management at the time may have felt like that Sears was still their main competition and didn't realize this Big K down the street and this Big WM across the street were a problem. Walmart and K-Mart, they just never looked at them. Sears had always been the main competition for Otasco, no matter what, up until that point.

**JE:** You were the Otasco man.

**DS:** Yeah.

**JE:** For many, many years.

**DS:** Yeah.

**JE:** Any other clients or commercials that might stand out?

**DS:** Oh, goodness. A friend of mine asked me one time how many commercials he thought I had done? He's always saying that I've done 150 thousand. That's ridiculous. A true figure might be, over fifty-four years here in town, I've probably done somewhere between sixty and a hundred thousand spots, something like that. I don't do so many anymore.

I did the school bond issue here recently and a few others now and then. But nonetheless, other spots, we did a lot of really fun spots for Pepsi because Pepsi was always sponsoring everything that came into sight. The Hughes Brothers were just great promoters and had great feelings about being a part of the community. And then later, they sort of got out of the business and the bottling company locally was bought out by somebody else.

People like Roy Belford, he was a great friend of ours out there and he's gone. Dick Hughes is gone. I'm not sure, I think Bill's still around, but great, great people to work with and work for. I'll never forget that opportunity that they gave us.

**JE:** Some people are probably thinking, "Well, ask about "Ugh! U-Need-Um Tires," which was nothing to do with you, but probably at the same time, competing with Otasco? Is that true?"

**DS:** Oh, yeah. Yeah. Jim Wheaton, funny, funny guy, had a great sense of humor, just a marvelous sense of humor. And he came up with that, "Ugh! U-Need-Um Tires," and, boy, I'll tell you, that was as powerful as, "Thank you, here's your change," in my mind.

Jim and I got to know each other real well before he passed away. He was a fun guy, fun guy to talk to. And he would come up here, he'd want to do something over here that he couldn't do with his little mini recorder, and he'd come over and say, "Could you help me with this?"

Sometimes I'd charge him, sometimes I didn't. He did a great job for Need-Um Tire Company.

**JE:** But it was at the same time they were competing.

**DS:** A lot of it.

**JE:** Two of you—

**DS:** A lot of it was going on, but Otasco had almost six hundred stores, not that many in Tulsa, obviously. But Need-Um had one or two locations, maybe three at the most.

The funniest story I ever heard about Jim Wheaton, if you remember hearing him you know what his voice sounded like. He would put an ad in trade magazines, trying to solicit business, and the ad would talk about what he does as a commercial announcer. I wish I

had a copy of it, but anyway, basically the essence of the ad was, “If you’re looking to hire the second worst voice\* in Tulsa, Oklahoma, you want to talk to Jim Wheaton. He does spots for these accounts,” and so forth.

When it said the “second worst voice,” there’s an asterisk there. At the very bottom of the ad, there’s the little explanatory asterisk, which says, “The worst voice belongs to a lady florist in Tulsa, Oklahoma.” And he was talking about Christina Tinger, I think, who owned Christina’s Flowers for years and years and years.

He may have hit everything right on the money. Christina’s did her own commercials and “she was as gravelly and crackly as you could be [in gravelly voice].” I think Wheaton was just one step better than she was but not a full step. [laughing]

**JE:** Yeah. Here we are, 2010, and Irving Productions has been producing since 1970. Your voice—

**DS:** Actually since ’66, but incorporated since 1970.

**JE:** Right. And your voice has become an icon. If people don’t know you as Dick Schmitz, they’ve certainly heard your voice on many, a many campaign, that’s for sure. Political campaigns too, I would imagine.

**DS:** Yeah—

**JE:** For [unrecognizable]

**DS:** I don’t do so many of those because I refuse to do the negative type ad, and that’s what so much of it is about these days. I just ignore it, you know.

**JE:** Yeah.

**DS:** I just can’t do it.

## Chapter 22 - 6:34

### Commercial Stories

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**John Erling:** Do you have a story about a commercial, an anecdote down through the years? It really worked? It really flopped?

**Dick Schmitz:** I can tell you one, I’m not sure I can remember the price. And this is a silly story but it’s absolutely the truth. There was a furniture store in town called Horn Brothers, and it was owned by a real nice guy called Icorn, M. A. Icorn, but he referred to it as Horn Brothers. It was the low-end furniture dealer of the world. But he was a promoter and he did radio, and I mean, it was just coming out our ears at KAKC and other stations as well.

So he hired this one agency to produce some stuff. The gal who was going to be the main writer, she could talk to him and relate to him, but she wasn’t sure where to go on



this thing. So she called me one day and she said, "Is there any way that you could maybe come up with two or three ideas on spots that we could do?"

And I said, "Well, let me see what I can come up with. Let's see what I can think about."

I had heard a spot done by 7-Eleven, strangely enough, over in Oklahoma City, that was sort of a funny spot and had a little twist to the idea. And I thought, "Well, you know, maybe I could take that idea and develop our own thing." I didn't want to do it exactly the way they did it, but we came up with this idea of doing these spots.

I sat down, and actually, my wife, Alma, and I wrote some of this material and submitted it back to this girl that was the writer for the agency.

And she said, "Oh, I don't know." She said, "I don't think he'll understand what we're trying to do here."

And I said, "Well, let me produce some of them real quick." And so I hired some friends of mine to just do these normal type voices. I wish I could play the darn things for you because they were funny.

But the funniest one of all, strangely enough, I had Alma do. We did about four or five of these things and the funniest one, the first spot that went on the air had to do with little kiddy rockers, little tiny rockers that little kids who might not be over maybe two, three, four years old, max, could sit in and rock. I had Alma do this thing and she did it. [in strange voice] "Last Christmas, when we opened our presents, we got them." And she went on from there, using this silly little voice. "Horn Brothers has got those little kiddy rockers for sale right now. They're just \$2.50 each." Now that's two dollars and fifty cents for a little kiddy rocker. "We got one of those last year and they've got them on sale again and last year, you know, it didn't seem like we had such a punk Christmas. I mean, nobody burned a hole in our couch." And she goes on with all these silly expressions as to what didn't happen because she had bought this little kiddy rocker from Horn Brothers.

This spot ran one time, maybe twice, in the morning, and I'm not sure what stations. All I know is Ike calls the agency and says, "Take that spot off the air. I'm completely out of kiddy rockers!"

So you wanted a little anecdote, that's the one I can give you that comes to my mind. And I still have that spot. I'd love for you to hear it. I can even give it to you sometime if you wanted to hear the real thing. I'm probably not repeating it the way it was, but that, plus some others.

And then I had a niece that did another one. They're just silliest little expressions about what didn't happen at Christmas because they had done this. [weird voice] "It seems like the crab grass didn't grow quite as much either." They were funny and they got the job done.

I'm telling you, we, we wrote the spots, we produced the spots, we paid the talent. And I think the entire budget for everything was two hundred and fifty dollars. You can imagine how that would go over today. [laughing]

**JE:** And you retained them as a client forever and ever.

**DS:** No, we didn't. He was one that went from one place to the next, wherever he could get the best "deal." And he was trying to give customers a good deal by the pricing. You could buy six pieces of furniture out there for five hundred dollars, you know. [laughing]

**JE:** Well, he got a good deal from Irving Productions.

**DS:** He did, he did. He passed away here not too long ago. And the nice thing about Ike was that somebody finally recognized his service in World War II. It wasn't until maybe, I'm going to say, maybe four or five years before he passed away that he was honored by getting a medal, and it was a Purple Heart or better, from a standpoint of what he had done in World War II for us.

I was glad to see him get that, a nice write-up in the paper about it, and so forth.

**JE:** There was another furniture guy in town who did his own commercials.

**DS:** John F. Long.

**JE:** John F. Long.

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

**JE:** Did you have any connection to him at all?

**DS:** We knew his video editor, a fellow by the name of Glen Blake.

**JE:** Okay.

**DS:** And we occasionally would do stuff. And I sold some microphones to John Long. We were changing mics down here and they were looking for some and they liked what we had. And so we sold them a mic or two, and maybe a recorder that Glen was wanting to add to his little offline stuff.

**JE:** So that produced out of another...production house?

**DS:** Yeah, and he didn't do any radio to speak of. And anyway, it was on-camera TV.

**JE:** So he did it at the TV station?

**DS:** Well, he actually put it on studio in that building he had out here, the big furniture store. Uh—

**JE:** He was good and everybody knew John F. Long.

**DS:** [laughing] Yeah, boy, they did. They did.

**JE:** Yeah.

**DS:** You know, I love things like that when I think about—well, used to be a fellow here in town named Flint Reeves that would come on and do stuff for Reeves TV and Appliances, and they had three or four stores. "And don't forget old Happy out on 3rd Street," or whatever it was.

I would go over to classes at TU and talk to the students sometimes and they'd say, "Well, you don't do any of those Reeves' spots, do you? You don't do any of those John F. Long?"

And I said, "What's the matter with those spots?" I said, "No, I don't really get involved in doing those."

"Well, they just grate on me, they just..."

And I said, "Look, let me just tell you something about those people. Those people are spending money in my industry. And as long as they're not saying anything illegal, immoral, or illogical, why shouldn't they be allowed to do what they want to do?"

And I can tell you this, Flint Reeves is one of the best pitchmen in town. He doesn't sound like it, but I'll tell you, he sells a lot of TVs. And that's always been my philosophy. If they're not doing anything wrong, they're not illegal, and they're not immoral, let them do it, for goodness' sakes.

**JE:** But the point was, those people knew the names. They were talking about them. And that's what we want people to do, recall their name.

**DS:** Henry Primo is a example of a guy that started something that every agency person I talked to in town, said, "That guy's nuts, he's crazy."

And what he said was, "Crown Buick, 4444 South Sheridan, right next door to Sam's."

**JE:** Yeah.

**DS:** Right next door to Sam's.

**JE:** All it took.

**DS:** And that was it. If they didn't know where Crown Buick was, they knew where Sam's was. Their philosophy was, "He's promoting Sam's more than he's promoting the auto dealership. They're nuts."

He did the job.

**JE:** Yeah.

**DS:** And he's proven it.

## Chapter 23 - 7:25

### Advice for Students

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**John Erling:** What about students who want to be in this business? It's different from what it was when you got started in the '50s. Here we are now, what would you tell them?

**Dick Schmitz:** Well, it depends on whether you want to get into the broadcast business or you want to get in the advertising business. My concentration, ever since probably '66, has been in the ad business. I would say, "Go for it. Anything you want to try to do, there's so

much new developing, not only in broadcast, but also in advertising every day. Every week, there's something new coming along.

The thing that I like so much is the recognition of the universities and the colleges, really throughout the country, because as a University of Illinois graduate I'm constantly being made aware of new things going on at that campus up there. And then what they're trying to do with regard to communications and broadcast and media.

And the same thing I could say here in Tulsa, for example. The University of Tulsa has a marvelous program out there, headed up by a friend of mine named Bill Hinkle. They are doing things that they never thought about doing before. They're competing, they're putting teams together that work for an entire semester, to submit themselves into competition. Under Bill's leadership, they have directed people to be able to accomplish taking real clients and putting together campaigns for them, in every medium.

What they're doing out there is really teaching them the nuts and bolts of this business. It's a lot different from what it was.

I mentioned early in this conversation, a fellow named Tom Land, the first station manager I ever worked for. Another thing Tom told me was this, which I never really began to appreciate until later, Tom said to me, and he said this to me in the same conversation where he chewed me out, sort of, about that lousy sportscast I did. He said, "You know, when you get out of here and you go up to the University of Illinois, I hope you have good luck in finding a job."

Well, it took me a while to do it, but I did.

He said, "But you know, going up there to get an education as an announcer may not work."

And I said, "Why is that?"

He said, "Well, I'll tell you, when somebody comes to me and says they've graduated from a college, not just Illinois, but a college, they've got a degree in Broadcast, I just mark them down as no experience."

And now it's not quite that way, with the people being able to participate in university-owned facilities. With them being able to have these extra type of training programs that they're offering in Broadcast. And then Bill Hinkle's classes in Advertising and Marketing, it's a different story. They're still not geared for the real world, but they're a lot closer to it than they were fifty years ago.

**JE:** Yeah. But don't you think they also have to have a real passion? I say just radio, when I was interested and I had a hard time driving by a studio without wanting to be in it while a live broadcast was going on. It was a passion that was planted in my mind from way back when. And it's that kind of thing that probably is going to have to drive somebody to the profession.

**DS:** I think you're right. Absolutely. That's what kept me going to all those stations up in Champaign or Banner, and that also motivated me to formulate a philosophy that I later used. These people, with one or two exceptions, didn't want to talk to me. They didn't even want me to come in and bother them about "Can I give you a demo or audition?"

I had no facility to hand them a tape or anything like this. I just wanted to go in and read a piece of copy. And nobody would let me do that. From the day I started Irving and the day I started recording, anybody that called me up, and I mean, anybody, or saw me and wanted to come, "Could I try that? People tell me I got a good voice. Could I give that a try? Do you think I could do that?"

"I don't know, but if you'll call us up we'll schedule a time, we'll give you thirty minutes to an hour. Come in and do it, no charge. If you want to leave here with a tape, we'll give you a tape. If you want more than one you're going to have to pay for it. And I'll tell you, and the people that work with me will tell you what we think of you. If it's no good, it's no good."

I had a guy, a friend of mine in this businessmen's group that I belong to that was all set to spend three to four thousands dollars to go out to New Jersey, I think it was, and take a course. He had submitted some demos to them. He had never been a radio announcer before. He submitted some demos and right away they got to him, "Oh, you've got real talent. You've got real possibilities. Here's our crash course in this," and so forth. Something like three or four thousand dollars.

He told me about it, and I said, "Well, come over to our studio first and let me hear you."

He came over here, he read for me, he has a very nice voice and he's great to talk to, but he doesn't belong in the radio business. You run into people like that. And I told him that. I said, "Pete, save your money, please."

And he did, he didn't go. And I'm glad he didn't because it would have been a waste of time. No matter what they tell you out there, those guys are in the business of selling these courses. Well, that's fine, but there are people I can get off the street that can read as well as he can. It's not the reading, it's being able to take direction, interpretation, and so forth.

I remember when you came over to do some stuff for me one time. For Ackerman. Well, it may not have been Ackerman, that was Billy Parker. That was another similar story. You know who Billy Parker is, and you know what you do. And I remember in the case of Parker, specifically, and I thought it happened with you also, the agency was here. You sat down, you read a piece of copy, and I thought, "Well, they want John. That's John Erling." Or, "They want Billy, that's Billy Parker." And all of a sudden the agency has to start telling you how to read, direct you on how to do this or how to do that.

And I finally just turned around, I know in the case of Parker, he did a couple of reads. And I finally just turned around to the agency, and I said, "Did you want Billy Parker because he's Billy Parker?"

“Yeah.”

“Well, let him be Billy Parker, please. You’re not helping him, you’re not doing yourself any good.”

And they got the picture. And I think I said the same thing to the guy after—you got out of here easier than Billy did. But I said the same thing to him as he was walking out, I said, “You know, the first tape John did is probably the one we should use.”

He said, “Why do you think that?”

I said, “Because that was John Erling, and you wanted John Erling to do this. Right?”

“Well, yeah.” It was probably an out of town spot and you weren’t giving your name like you normally do, but it’s the style, it’s the delivery, it’s how do you interpret? How do you phrase? How do you get the listener’s ear? And you were able to do that.

Same thing with Billy, I mean, he’s country from the word go, and he can lay it on you, boy, but if they don’t want him, get somebody else. Let me do it!” You know, I’m not country, I’m not John Erling, I’m just sort of a strange old announcer, that’s all.

**JE:** Well, you’ve met with a whole lot of success and you have tremendous respect in our community. From your radio days, for your production, I suppose more so now, that must make you feel good, you have that kind of respect of business people.

United Way, you’ve been connected with United Way for many, many years. I’m going to list, when I do my intros, and so forth on you, all the accolades you’ve received and lifetime membership and all that. But at any rate, the fact that you have this kind of standing in the community—all from a guy who just wanted a job as a mobile newsman.

**DS:** [laughing]

**JE:** Makes you feel good.

**DS:** It does.

**JE:** Well, thank you for this time. You’ve given us a lot of time.

**DS:** Well—

**JE:** That thing was a lot and I appreciate it very much. It’s nice, you know, when you and I were way back and when, and you were back further than I, who would have known that there’s a technology that can preserve voices forever and ever and ever on a website so that students can hear you, can hear me, fifty years from now. Click on and say, “Wow, that’s the way it was.”

**DS:** Thank you, John. I’ve enjoyed it.

**JE:** Thank you.

**DS:** Thank you.

**JE:** Thank you.

**Chapter 24 - 0:33****Conclusion**

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