

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Announcer: Donna and Roger Hardesty grew up in the western Oklahoma town of Fort Cobb. They each knew the meaning of hard work when they met at age 15.

Donna comes from a large family, many holding teaching degrees. After graduating from the University of Tulsa, she taught for a year at Sperry High School. She then joined Roger, becoming a real estate agent, as his construction company became the largest single-family construction company in the area with divisions in nine midwestern states.

When The Hardesty Foundation was established in 2005, Donna placed a significant emphasis on the value of education in her grantmaking endeavors, which included the Hardesty Library.

Roger and Donna were truly a team, leading to the success of the Hardesty company and the foundation, making a major impact on the Tulsa community.

Chapter 2 – 9:45 No Electricity or Plumbing

John Erling (JE): My name is John Erling, and today's date is October 7, 2025.
So Donna, would you state your full name, please?

Donna Hardesty (DH): Donna Jo Hardesty.

JE: And your birth date?

DH: December 16th, 1936.

JE: And your present age?

DH: I am 88. I'll be 89 in December.

JE: Where are we recording this interview?

DH: In my home in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

JE: Where were you born?

DH: Frederick, Oklahoma.

JE: Your mother's name?

DH: My mother's name was Ethel Chaband. That was her maiden name, C-H-A-B-A-N-D.

JE: Where was she born, and where did she grow up?

DH: She grew up in Caddo County.

JE: What was her personality like?

DH: She was a teacher. She spent most of her life teaching. She was a good mother. She was kind and gentle and had five kids—which I'm not sure she planned on having that many—but our house was always dirty (Laughing).

JE: (Laughing) What was your house like? Was it big, small, or—

DH: Oh, it was small, probably two or three bedrooms. It was just outside Carnegie, Oklahoma.

JE: So that means you had five brothers and sisters.

DH: Yes, and I'm the oldest.

JE: How many girls or boys?

DH: Three girls, one boy, and myself.

JE: So that was a little close, wasn't it, in that house?

DH: I mean, yeah, we had little kids running around everywhere.

JE: Your father's name?

DH: Lloyd Manley. Lloyd W. Manley.

JE: What was his personality like?

DH: He was strict. He farmed as well as taught school in Carnegie. Me being the oldest, I spent a lot of time in the field. When I was 15, I drove a truck—a pickup truck with a combine header on the back—and he drove the big truck with the combine on the back. We went to harvest in Burnet, Texas, and I drove all the way down. I didn't even have a driver's license.

JE: You went down there to harvest for other people in Texas?

DH: Yes, yes, yes.

JE: A way to make extra money.

DH: Their harvest was always a little bit before ours. My father was a wheat farmer, and being further south, theirs always got ripe first. We got back home in time to do ours.

JE: So you were expected to work, weren't you?

DH: Yeah, I've got a good work ethic.

JE: But he was a teacher in addition to being a farmer.

DH: Yes, he was.

JE: And he was a teacher where?

DH: In Carnegie. He taught science in junior high.

JE: And your mother?

DH: Taught fourth grade in Carnegie.

JE: Was a lot expected of you as far as—

DH: I did a lot of babysitting, and Jackie, my youngest sister, who's 16 months younger than I am, did the laundry. We had a little chicken house with a washing machine and water, and we did all the laundry when the weather provided, hung them out. One thing I remember doing was Mother always made starch for us to take to the laundry room. We starched her nightgown and hung it up and let it drip dry, and then we starched it again until it would stand up on the floor. Then we took it in to her. We thought it was so funny, but she didn't think it was funny. She made us go back out and wash the nightgown again.

JE: You guys were having fun.

DH: I guess.

JE: Your father—he went to college. Where did he go?

DH: OU, and he was a wrestler.

JE: Yeah, wrestler. Didn't they have a nickname for him?

DH: Bull.

JE: Bull Manley?

DH: Uh-huh (In agreement, laughing)

JE: What a name.

DH: He was a big old guy.

JE: I was reading about him. He almost made the Olympics.

DH: Yes, he did.

JE: So would you say he was at least six feet or taller? Pretty tall guy?

DH: Yeah, six-three or four.

JE: So your mother, she went to college?

DH: She went to OU. My grandmother moved to Norman when my mother and her younger sister went. She had a sister one year younger than she was. My grandmother rented a big house and made a boarding house out of it so she could keep an eye on the girls. She took in people—sold bedrooms to college kids.

JE: Oh, in Norman, your grandmother did that?

DH: Yes, she loaded up and went with them.

JE: So when your mother went there and your father was going to OU, were they there at the same time, your mother and your father?

DH: I believe so.

JE: Right. And so your grandmother was there to keep an eye on everybody.

DH: Yes.

JE: Your grandmother was quite industrious.

DH: She was the hardest-working person I've ever seen. She would get up, cook breakfast. All of my grandfather's brothers kind of moved in with them, and some of them eventually got married. But she cooked for all of them and did their laundry. She milked the cows, gathered the eggs, picked up pecans. She picked up enough pecans one fall to buy a new car, and she didn't even drive.

JE: Wow. So that's your grandmother on your mother's side?

DH: Yes. And I didn't mind being poor when I was young. My parents were fairly frugal, and my mother didn't even have a washing machine until all the kids moved out—I mean a washer and dryer.

JE: Did those houses early on have electricity, or did you ever live without electricity?

DH: Yes, when we were children, we lived on a place that didn't have electricity. And it didn't have indoor plumbing or water. We had to go to the well and bring in the water. We all took a bath once a week, all in the same bathtub and the same water. It was a lot of work.

JE: That was in Carnegie?

DH: It was south of Carnegie. It was on one of the farms we owned. There was a house on it, and we moved there at some point. Then eventually we moved just outside Carnegie.

JE: So at night were you using kerosene lamps for your light? And for heat you'd burn wood, I suppose?

DH: Yeah, they had a wood stove. Roger's parents didn't have electricity or water or indoor plumbing when we married and moved in with them. That was the man's job—to carry the water. We all took a bath in the same water, starting with the youngest.

JE: So even when you moved in with Roger's parents, they didn't have electricity either?

DH: I don't think so. They did have a telephone, but I think they had to pull their own telephone line from wherever it was to their house—dig the poles and put them up.

JE: They had to do it themselves?

DH: Yes. And my mother's father and his brothers built the schoolhouse. That part of the country is called Alden. My family was French. My grandfather was a full-blood Frenchman, and they were not well educated, but they read a lot and had a lot of good ideas. They invented something for lighting at my grandmother's house. They were always building something, and they built the school and the church with their own money.

JE: Your sisters growing up—who dominated? Was it you or one of your other sisters? Were they the most dominant, telling everybody else what to do? Did you have fun?

DH: Oh yeah, we had fun. My youngest sister and the sister just younger than me was always kind of a prima donna. She always liked to get dressed up, and she was not real big on working the farm. She didn't like to have to go to the field. It was dirty and you'd get sunburned, and we were driving trucks when we were not old enough to drive trucks.

JE: What are their names?

DH: Jackie Witt is my sister just younger than me, and then there's my brother who lives in Carnegie. His name is Mike, and he's probably three or four years younger than whoever I just mentioned. And then there's Karen and Kathy.

Chapter 3 – 7:30

Real Estate

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

Donna Hardesty (DH): Okay.

JE: Your education started in grade school—where did you go to grade school?

DH: I went to Carnegie, Oklahoma, Caddo County. Roger and I got married when I was in the 11th grade. After we married, we moved in with his parents in Del City, and I finished at Del City. Then I drove to OU one semester, and then he got a job finishing concrete in Tulsa with his brother, so we moved to Tulsa. I finished at TU.

JE: But there's a remarkable story here. In high school, you had a baby, and you were 16?

DH: No, I was 17. And that's the baby.

JE: Oh, she's sitting right over here, and her name is what?

DH: Deborah. Deborah Jo.

JE: OK, so I bring that up because despite that, you pressed on. You must have had a lot of help with her as a young mother, and you were still going to school. Who babysat?

DH: My mother-in-law. And when I went to school at TU, I planned all my classes around her. She was in kindergarten or first grade, and I planned all my classes around her classes so that I was always home when she got there.

JE: Obviously that happened in high school, and then you did finish high school, obviously.

DH: Finished high school. And then I went to OU—we lived with his parents in Del City and I drove back and forth to OU one semester. Then we moved to Tulsa, and that's when I started at TU. I had signed up to be a dietitian at OU, but when I got to Tulsa, they didn't have that degree offered. The closest thing they had was in Stillwater. I drove there one day just to see how far it was, but the roads weren't very good back then—we're talking in the '60s—and I came home and decided that wouldn't work for me. So I went back to TU and enrolled in home economics because that was the most credits I had that would transfer to that degree. I had a home economics education and taught school one year in Sperry. I drove from Tulsa to Sperry every day to teach,

JE: How about that?

DH: And I took Debbie with me and enrolled her in school there.

JE: I just marvel at the way you did this. Football players, I think in Sperry, really liked you, and they played some tricks on you.

DH: Yeah, they did.

JE: What did they do?

DH: I drove a Volkswagen Bug, and I was a 10th-grade sponsor. The kids really liked me. I tried to be a good teacher. I taught home economics and one study hall, and the study hall was 7th grade. One day I went out and couldn't find my car. I finally looked around and found it in the FFA barn—they had picked it up and moved it.

JE: That's funny. But you know, you looked at it as they all liked you, and that's why they did that for you. Right. Along in here, we need to talk about Roger too because he was beginning his work to support the family. This goes back to your high school days and when you got married. So he worked real hard to provide.

DH: He's always been a good worker.

JE: He worked construction.

DH: Yes.

JE: Roger learned a lot watching others build houses. He worked for people who built homes, and then he learned how to do drywall. He learned enough to hire a crew and start his own construction business. Did you ever think he wasn't going to be able to provide for you?

DH: No, I never thought that. We both worked hard. When we started building houses, we would hold open houses for our new houses. We took a lot of trade-ins up north for down payments on houses in the east part of town—people who were trying to get out of the north part of town. We took her with us -- took Debbie with us -- and we worked a lot of long hours and built a pretty good house.

JE: You became a real estate agent, didn't you?

DH: Yes.

JE: Right. So the houses up north—they would take those houses and trade them to you as a down payment on a new house.

DH: Yes, yes.

JE: Then what did you do about the houses that were traded in to you?

DH: I sold them. Back then, you could assume somebody's loan—I'm not sure you can do that anymore. I would just put somebody in there who had a few hundred dollars or more in their equity. Then I'd put that one on the market—the one whatever they traded in—and get rid of it the best way I could.

JE: And you were learning on the go, on the fly, weren't you?

DH: Yes. Anyway, that's the reason I quit teaching. It was the fact that I said I'd substitute the next year, and I think I substituted twice. But every day they called me to substitute, he needed me for something—he needed me to show a house or meet a contractor or something—so it got to where I just gave up substituting.

JE: You two have been a team for a long time—not just being married, but professionally you were, for sure. I asked him how the marriage stayed together so long. What do you say? You probably want to know what he said. (Laughing)

DH: I don't know. There were a lot of times that I just couldn't stand to look at him. He was just so irritating. He's very demanding. I mean, when I get a bottle and try to open it, he tries to show me—he'll sit over there and tell me how to get the lid off whatever I'm trying to do.

JE: Controlling. Mr. Control, huh? So where's Michelle coming—the birth here? What were you doing when Michelle was born?

DH: Working in construction.

JE: Okay.

DH: There's 12 or 13 years difference between Debbie and Michelle. I had gone to the doctor—I would've liked to have had three children. They didn't have anything really good back then. He gave me some kind of a pill, and that didn't work, and then all of a sudden I turned up pregnant.

JE: Well, that must have been pretty happy.

DH: Yeah, I was happy. I was from a big family, and I really enjoy my family, my sisters and brother. Two of my sisters live within walking distance of this house, and I see them once a week. We do a lot of gossiping and socializing.

JE: How fortunate to have your sisters with you.

DH: I know; yeah.

JE: So did Debbie babysit Michelle?

DH: She didn't even like the baby after we got it. (Laughing)

JE: (Laughing)

Chapter 4 – 10:08

A Team

John Erling (JE): What was Tulsa like back then when you were living in Tulsa? Where did you eat or where would you—

Donna Hardesty (DH): We had a one-bedroom apartment with a kitchenette at 708 South Trenton. It was ten dollars a week, I think. We shared the bathroom with ten other apartments, and we lived there probably a year. Then we moved over by TU, two or three houses down from the campus. That's how I worked out the school thing—I'd take Debbie to school, then go pick her up, and then I'd go to school. If Roger wasn't working—he was working with the concrete then—on cold days he couldn't work.

JE: He must have admired the fact that you wanted to pursue your education like that.

DH: He didn't ever say one way or the other.

JE: Because he didn't do that. Because he went to work so that he could provide for you.

DH: He did. And he took some correspondence courses. He probably had enough to graduate from somewhere, but he never bothered to do that. It just didn't seem important to him. He's really smart.

JE: You and Roger, when you were sharing hobbies and so forth—he was a big hunter. Did you go along on his hunting expeditions?

DH: Yes, I did. I've been to Africa probably six or eight times. But locally I didn't go. If he was going to somebody's ranch to shoot a deer, I didn't go, but I did go on the trips to Africa.

JE: But those were big game hunts you were there for.

DH: Yes, yes.

JE: And you enjoyed going on those hunting expeditions?

DH: It was kind of a cultural shock to see how the people lived, but it was interesting.

JE: And you also went up to Alaska.

DH: Yes.

JE: What happened there?

DH: Well, we went to Alaska, but nothing exciting happened. We went muskox hunting, and I didn't go out with them because they went on snowmobiles. They got us a muskox, and they brought it into the house when they came in that night. First of all, I said to the Eskimo woman, "Don't you think we should start dinner?" And she said, "Oh no, we never start dinner till we see them show back up," because sometimes the weather would get so bad, and there were a few cabins stuck here and there that they could go into and stay through a storm. She brought it in and skinned it that night on the living room floor on a tarp.

JE: Wow. And then had dinner.

DH: Yeah. The Eskimo there get a lot of money—still do, I think—but she had a grand piano in this little house, and a sewing machine that didn't work. I tried to fix that for her. I got it fixed, though I doubt it stayed fixed. I went to the school just to have something to do, and I asked the kids, "Do you have any questions about Oklahoma?" And one said, "No, but have you ever been to Hawaii?" That's where they all go because it's warm.

JE: From Alaska, yup. And what did you do for entertainment in Tulsa? Did you go to movies?

DH: We went to some movies, yeah. We didn't have a TV for a while. We used to go to the drive-in.

JE: How about restaurants that you went to?

DH: Jamil's. We didn't go out very often, but usually we went to Jamil's if we wanted to.

JE: How about stores—clothing stores and all that—where did you shop in Tulsa?

DH: We didn't shop very much, but I shopped at Vandever's downtown.

JE: I suppose you were pretty careful about how you spent your money too in those days.

DH: We were. Yeah; there wasn't a lot of it, and it had to go far.

JE: When you were building the apartments, you were overseeing the finances, weren't you?

DH: I was mostly building houses—single-family. Roger went over to apartments and commercial, and I handled all the single-family. And I sometimes I had 40 or 50 houses going at one time.

JE: But you were an accountant too, weren't you, overseeing the finances?

DH: Well, I wrote all the checks to the subs and stuff like that, but I was busy.

JE: And then you drove this old truck.

DH: Yes, I did.

JE: A work truck?

DH: ... to school when I was going to TU. It had a big hole in the bottom of it. It's a wonder I didn't gas myself. It was rusted out at the bottom of it. I don't know where we got that.

JE: But when Roger was building houses or apartment buildings, not only here but in other communities, financially, life was getting much better for you.

DH: It was some better, yeah.

JE: Right. So you remember that one house you talked about when you moved into a better house—where was that?

DH: We took one of our own houses and lived there for a little while, and then we took a trade-in directly across the street from Southroads Mall. We lived there for a while, and then Roger built another house a little bit further south near 51st and Sheridan. We sold that house and moved to a bigger house.

JE: Well, that must have been interesting. I mean, you started out basically with not much of anything, and then to graduate to what you did.

DH: Yes, it is amazing. I never expected it. I mean, I didn't—I never thought about it. We just got up and did what we had to do every day.

JE: Right. But then as you look back on what happened to you, it's got to be marvelous to you to know that—

DH: It was a great surprise.

JE: Roger is known in the community for what he's done, and a lot of people need to know that this is the woman behind him.

DH: Well, most of the people that worked with me do know that, because I was much gentler with the contractors than he was. When I had a hard time, I'd say, "Would you rather deal with me, or would you rather deal with Roger?"

JE: They said, "No, no—"

DH: "We'll do what you want us to."

JE: It was just meant to be that you two possessed these skills in different areas. He couldn't have done it without you.

DH: Probably not.

JE: And vice versa. Talking about houses, did you and Roger build a house on Marina Lake?

DH: Yes.

JE: Tell us where that is—Marina Lake.

DH: 21st and 100 Mingo. There's a big retention pond there. It is a lake, but it's manmade. We built the apartments around it, and my father-in-law and I built the house on the lake. It was up on poles because it was kind of a flood area—Mingo Creek, I guess. It did flood once when we lived there. We moved from there to the McBirney house and lived there for a few years. Roger always wanted this house, and he had told whoever he was dealing with—

JE: The house you're living in now?

DH: Yes. He told them if this house ever came on the market to let him know, and it did eventually. The real estate lady was saying, "Do you want to look at the closets?" And he said, "No, I'm not buying the house for the closets." Which it does have nice big closets.

JE: Do you know who built this house that we're in right now?

DH: John and Lottie Jane Maybee. I've got the original plans.

JE: Did you say "Maybee," as in the Maybee Center family—that family?

DH: Uh-huh. (In agreement)

JE: John Maybee?

DH: Uh-huh. (In agreement)

JE: Built this house?

DH: Yes. They both died, somebody else bought it and lived here a few years, and then we moved in. We're the last people. We've lived here over 40 years. It was built in 1935, but it has a lot of quality work.

JE: Let me bring you back to the McBirney mansion, where you lived for several years. By the way, I looked it up—it was James McBirney, co-founder of the Bank of Commerce, who lived there until 1976. You must have enjoyed living there. That's quite a nice place.

DH: It was a nice place. It had an elevator, a basement, and a little garage apartment behind a three-car garage. It was different. There were a lot of homeless people that kind of camped down over the hill where there was a natural spring that ran down there. People had always camped down

there, and occasionally, if I forgot to lock the door, I'd look up and somebody would be walking through my house. (Laughing)

JE: Wow.

Chapter 5 – 6:24

World War II

Donna Hardesty (DH): We used to drive to California.

John Erling (JE): You used to drive to California—why?

DH: To see my grandparents.

JE: Oh.

DH: We didn't do it very often. There were five of us.

JE: And who would drive?

DH: My dad.

JE: Remember the car—what it was?

DH: Chevrolet. We got a brand-new Chevrolet right after the war. And we had one of those little funky air blowers that you put on the window and it would blow air in. Did you ever see one of those?

JE: No. Wow. So you're talking about World War II, weren't you?

DH: Yes.

JE: Right. Do you remember worrying about that, wondering whether or not the United States was—

DH: We were pretty well self-contained. They grew almost everything they ate. They had cattle and beef, and we never really suffered through the Depression. I mean, I'm sure they suffered, but we never did without any food or anything like that.

JE: No? Farmers always survived because they could provide.

DH: But they didn't talk much about anything in the family.

JE: About what was going on in the world? Right.

DH: We had a radio, but no TV. The Kansas City Star was the only newspaper you could get in Carnegie, and it had to be by subscription.

JE: Oh.

DH: So that's where the little news we got came from the Kansas City Star.

JE: Interesting. It wouldn't have been an Oklahoma City paper?

DH: Well, we're talking 19—I was born in 1936. So, I don't know. I remember during the war, we'd save up toothpaste tubes and take them to the drugstore in Anadarko. Whenever anybody went to Anadarko, we'd send all of those. That was one of the things they wanted for the war. I don't know what they did with them.

JE: Empty toothpaste tubes. There was rationing going on during the war—gas and all that—but maybe farmers weren't affected by that.

DH: I remember when the war was over. We lived out on the hill, and my dad came in and said, "The war's over," and I said, "Oh, OK, that's good." I mean, it didn't really affect me one way or the other. I was so young, but I was glad it was over.

JE: Yeah.

DH: We had a bootlegger in Carnegie...

JE: A bootlegger?

DH: Yeah, that sold whiskey. My dad paid him a visit when we were growing up and told him if he ever sold any of his kids liquor, he'd have to pay for it—he'd come back and deal with him.

JE: Good, good.

DH: And there was one beer joint that I was never in. I don't know if my sisters peeked their heads in; I don't think so. It was just kind of a no-no. So, we led a pretty simple life.

JE: How about church? Did you guys go to church?

DH: Yes, we went to church.

JE: What church was it?

DH: We were Baptists then, but in all the different places we lived, you just went to whatever church they had. Most of those little communities had one or two churches. If they had a Catholic church, somebody would come in once a month to have service. For the most part, you just took what you could get. My mother was Presbyterian at one time, so we weren't always Baptist. But I still have a lot of Baptist in me. I'm Methodist now.

JE: You do? What does that mean—you have a lot of Baptist in you?
(Chuckling)

DH: (Chuckling) Well, I just grew up in the Baptist church. A lot of their doctrine still kind of stuck with me, but I think the Baptist church has changed a lot in the last few years. I think they're a little more—well, there was none of that going on when we were growing up.

JE: You mean evangelical, is that what you mean?

DH: Yeah.

JE: But now you call yourself a Methodist.

DH: Yeah, I belong to the Methodist church here in town.

JE: Which one?

DH: First United Methodist.

JE: OK, right.

DH: So anyway, we're flexible. (Laughing)

JE: Right.

DH: And when we were teenagers, if somebody asked us to go out on Sunday night, we'd tell our parents -- we didn't always go -- that we were going to church.

JE: You told your parents you were going to church—and instead, where did you go?

DH: Driving around. Carnegie has one street—it's called Main Street—and you just made a big circle, drove around and around, waved at everybody. I don't know. Go out in the country and park and kiss?

JE: They did that in Tulsa too.

DH: But there's so much going on now that I would never have believed when I was 16 that could happen to people. The world has just gone crazy.

JE: You and Roger never got involved politically at all, I don't think, did you?

DH: Oh, a little bit. He's an independent. John Glenn spent the night here. He was coming through Tulsa. He and Roger were friends. I think it was kind of a fundraiser—we had a party for him, and then he spent the night here.

JE: Probably running for president then, trying to run?

DH: Maybe. I don't remember.

Chapter 6 – 8:41

Giving Back to Tulsa

John Erling (JE): Where was it that it started coming about that “we should give back to the community?”

Donna Hardesty (DH): When we got enough money to give back. I don't remember exactly when that was, but it was quite a long time ago. In small ways we gave back, and then when we started making good money, we gave a little bit more.

JE: Right. Well, then you did establish the Hardesty Family Foundation in 2005. But before that, you got involved with the library—the City-County Library—and that was in the 1980s. The donation was the catalyst for the development of the endowment, which helped the library with special programs. The South Regional Library was renamed in honor of you and Roger, the know that that is Hardesty Library. Was that one of your focuses? Was that your idea to start focusing on the library?

DH: Not too much. I always left that to Roger. He's never just turned vast amounts of money over to me to do that with, so I just said, "It's your job—you do it." I'm on the board of the trust.

JE: The library became too small, so you and Roger donated eight acres of real estate there so they could construct a new, much bigger building.

DH: Yes.

JE: Then the family foundation, established in 2005, got involved in many areas—the Center for Individuals with Physical Challenges.

DH: Yeah, that's on 11th and Utica or something down that way.

JE: I drive by it all the time—Utica, right. But you must have had some input in some of this.

DH: Well, they make applications to the foundation, and there's a board. We all vote on it. Michelle and Dana research these companies, go by and look at them, talk to them and whatnot. They do a lot of the footwork.

JE: You mentioned Michelle. I was going to ask you about this—she went to college at New York University, and there was a modeling agency there that invited her to model. And I guess you said no to that.

DH: Pretty much. When she graduated, she moved back home, and I don't know if she's been back to New York or not. It was really time-consuming—by the time you got dressed up, got your makeup on and your hair done, then went to the photographer—it took so much time. It was just too time-consuming, and she really didn't have that in mind for her future anyway.

JE: So she did some of the modeling?

DH: She did, yeah. She did a thing or two. She did some shows here in Tulsa—Bill Blass' show at...

JE: Miss Jackson's?

DH: Yeah, and at Southern Hills. It just seemed like a waste of time to her, so she just dropped it.

JE: Right. You have grandchildren now, from Debbie and Michelle. Who are they?

DH: Debbie has two—Alex and Paul—and Michelle has one. I've got three grandsons and I have three great-grandchildren. One's a two-year-old girl, one's almost three, a boy, and then a baby boy belongs to Paul. So I have three great-grandchildren.

JE: The grandson you didn't name is Connor, right?

DH: Yeah.

JE: And isn't he involved in the business today?

DH: I suspect that when Roger retires, he'll take over the airplane business because he's a pilot. He's learned a lot working with Roger. He's a helicopter pilot, and he flies the Gulfstream.

JE: All this flying that Roger did—did you enjoy flying with him?

DH: We took a lot of really nice vacations—Paris, London, Switzerland, Iceland. Been a lot of places. I can't even remember where all they were.

JE: That he could fly those places.

DH: Yes.

JE: Some of the causes that you've been involved in include the Tulsa Zoo.

DH: That's a big favorite of the family. They love the zoo.

JE: You've helped Little Light House, which has a therapy garden there, Tulsa Garden Center, Life Senior Services, Community Food Bank, John 3:16 Mission, Meals on Wheels, USA BMX Hardesty National Track Stadium, Tulsa Community College West Campus, the Hardesty Student Success Center there, the Union Innovation Lab at Union High School, Tulsa Sobering Center, and the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation.

DH: Yeah, that's a big one of Roger's. He likes that one.

JE: The Mental Health Association of Oklahoma—you've supported them, and also criminal justice reform.

DH: Well, we primarily like to do things around Tulsa, but sometimes we do something in the state of Oklahoma, but it's mostly here in Tulsa.

JE: Were there people way back that you think helped you along the way—that were mentors that you looked up to?

DH: Yes, Bill Friman. I'm sure you don't know who he is—he's been dead forever—but he owned Mercury Mortgage. He gave us a lot of help in getting financing to build the houses and just general information.

JE: Yeah, that was a big help in your business.

DH: It was, and he liked Roger—called him “the Bear.”

JE: The Bear?

DH: Roger liked him, and we traveled some together. When you first start building your first two or three houses, you have to have somebody to recommend you to the bank to get the money. I remember they made Roger take out a million-dollar life insurance policy. As soon as we started making money, he dropped that.

JE: Well, you've had a good life, haven't you?

DH: Yes, we have. Excellent. I've got great grandkids that have never caused any problems. My daughters were kind of a pain to raise, but my grandkids have all been good. (Laughing)

JE: (Laughing) And Debbie's over here—Debbie, how do you feel about that? No, she's just smiling. That's funny. How would you like to be remembered?

DH: I don't know. I've never thought about it. I guess it's just as doing what we could with the money we had for the city or Oklahoma.

JE: Yeah. It's an amazing story—and what your foundation has done for this community, it really is amazing.

DH: It is amazing.

JE: And in so many areas; we already went through that.

DH: Yeah.

JE: It wasn't just one focus, it was spread out. If the Hardesty Foundation were taken out of this community, it would have made a big difference.

DH: It would, yeah. Of course, somebody might have filled the gap, but—

JE: Eventually, probably, but not at the level that you provided. When you think about Roger being born in a dugout—

DH: (Laughing)

JE: Isn't that an amazing story?

DH: Yeah.

JE: And then the two of you, for where you are today. Well, it was fun to meet you, and Debbie, you; and I've known Michelle now for some time, and Roger too, so I feel very fortunate to be able to come into your home and talk to you.

DH: I feel fortunate that you're doing this.

JE: All right.

DH: Thank you.

JE: Thank you.

Thank you for your support as we preserve Oklahoma's legacy one voice at a time, on VoicesofOklahoma.com