



# Frank Riesinger

Owner of Riesinger's Jewelry,  
WWII Vet, Creator of V-J Day  
Celebration

## Chapter 01 – Introduction

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**Announcer:** Riesinger's Jewelry was a mainstay in Utica Square for over fifty years with a heritage that dates back to the fourth floor above the Orpheum Theatre in downtown Tulsa. That was where Frank Riesinger's father, Otto, presided for many years over a jewelry repair store repairing items sent to him by retail jewelry stores in Tulsa.

Frank was home from military service when he witnessed downtown Tulsa's celebration of V-J Day (Victory over Japan) on August 14, 1945. Following his military service, Frank used the G.I. Bill to attend the University of Tulsa, graduating with a degree in business administration in 1949. It was while he was attending TU that he had a unique encounter with Thomas Gilcrease.

Frank learned the jewelry business from his father and opened Riesinger's retail store in Utica Square in 1952, one of the first stores in one of Tulsa's first shopping centers. He and his wife Bobbie operated Riesinger's Jewelry until 1983.

Through the years, Frank attended WW II commemorative events in France and Luxembourg, and created a V-J Day memorial event in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma.

He was nine-five when he recorded his oral history interview for [VoicesofOklahoma.com](http://VoicesofOklahoma.com).

## Chapter 02 – 9:40 Frank's Early Years

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**John Erling (JE):** My name is John Erling and today's date is May 23rd, 2022.  
So, Frank, would you state your full name, please?

**Frank Riesinger (FR):** Frank Otto Riesinger

**JE:** How do you spell “Riesinger?”

**FR:** R-I-E-S-I-N-G-E-R

**JE:** And your date of birth?

**FR:** August 20, 1926.

**JE:** And your present age?

**FR:** 95.

**JE:** And you’re looking forward to August?

**FR:** August 20 — I shall be 96.

**JE:** 96 years old. “Riesinger” — what’s the background of that? What nationality is that?

**FR:** German.

**JE:** German?

**FR:** Yeah.

**JE:** Okay.

**FR:** Of Frank Riesinger; he immigrated in the 1860s, settled in Cincinnati, Ohio. And that’s where Riesingers come from — Ohio. My grandfather, Frank Adam, came over and he settled there and my dad was born in Kansas City and then I was born here. So the Riesingers originally were from Germany, of course, and my mother’s father was from Switzerland. He was a Switzer, so they both spoke German in that part of Switzerland — they both spoke German.

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

**FR:** Here at my home in Broken Arrow.

**JE:** Where were you born?

**FR:** In Tulsa. It’s a suburb of Broken Arrow (chuckling)

**JE:** (Chuckling) Yes, it is. Yes, it is. It’s a nice suburb. I live in the suburb of Broken Arrow, right, right.

**FR:** Wow!

**JE:** So you were born in a hospital?

**FR:** No, in a home — in a duplex. At — the address is South Wheldeen — a block off of Peoria. So it’s about a mile from downtown Tulsa.

**JE:** And that’s where your parents lived.

**FR:** My parents in the north side duplex, at that time. And I was born in that duplex.

**JE:** Did you have brothers and sisters?

**FR:** I had an older sister — 3 years old at that time.

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

**FR:** ... was Emma Marie Harleg.

**JE:** And where was she from and where did she grow up?

**FR:** She was born in Kansas City and grew up in Kansas City, Missouri.

**JE:** Can you tell us what she was like? Describe her personality.

**FR:** She was my mother. She was very precious to me, so I can't describe her personality except that she was a wonderful mother and I had many precious years with her until she passed away too soon.

**JE:** So, how old was your mother when she died?

**FR:** She was 45.

**JE:** 45 years-old.

**FR:** Uh-huh.

**JE:** Then your father — what was your father's name?

**FR:** Otto Carl Riesinger. They called him "O.K." Riesinger.

**JE:** Okay. And where did he grow up? And where was he born?

**FR:** He was born in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1898. Shortly thereafter, they moved from there to Kansas City, so he grew up in Kansas City.

**JE:** So what did he do for a living?

**FR:** He was a jeweler, engraver, and die-cutter.

**JE:** Okay. And his personality? Was he outgoing?

**FR:** Very outgoing. Very industrious. He was very — at all times — he was busy doing something. Of course, during most of our early life was The Depression and he really had to be inventive just to keep our family going during The Depression.

**JE:** Right. And how old was he when he died?

**FR:** My dad was born in '98, so he was 74 when he died.

**JE:** Alright. And then your sister — did she live a long life?

**FR:** Yeah. She lived a long life. She just died 3 years ago. She was born in '23 and she just died 3 years ago.

**JE:** So how old then? She was ...

**FR:** Let's see. She would have been 93, I think.

**JE:** Wow. So it's interesting. Your mother dies early. Your father, seventy-some

**FR:** 74.

**JE:** 74. And here the two children live way beyond their parents.

**FR:** Way beyond. And then I have a younger brother who was born in '41. He's 14 years younger than me. He's still living and he's 72.

**JE:** Okay.

**FR:** So he and I are still living.

**JE:** We don't know why we live so long.

**FR:** Don't have a clue.

**JE:** I'm sure people ask you that: "How come you've been living so long?" But, you've taken care of yourself.

**FR:** Yes. I've been healthy most of my life — been extremely healthy and I have taken care of myself. I've lived a sober life. I never overate. I never drank. I never smoked. I never did anything bad (laughing). And, so, anyway, I lived a very careful life. I never took any chances and I never had any problems with anyone. I loved everyone going through these years and got along with everyone — never had any enemies; had lots of friends, most of them who are dead now. So, I just lived a very careful life.

**JE:** Is that one of the toughest things about getting old? That most of your friends are gone?

**FR:** Most of my friends are gone, of course.

**JE:** Yeah.

**FR:** I have 3 friends still living that are about my age. And they're in poorer health than I am, unfortunately, because of age.

**JE:** Yeah. Well, you're fortunate. You live here in your home, by yourself.

**FR:** That is fortunate.

**JE:** Very fortunate. Talk about your education. What was the first school you attended?

**FR:** Kindergarten. I went to kindergarten in Kansas City when I turned 5 and after kindergarten there, we moved to a small town in southwest Missouri. Humansville. And I attended 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades there in a tiny town — Humansville — population 1,000. And at that time, we moved back to Kansas City and I went through the 4th, 5th, and 6th, grades there in Kansas City; and then we moved from Kansas City back to my original birthplace here in Tulsa in '38, and I finished my education here — junior high at Wilson Junior High, high school at Rogers High School. Graduated there in '43 and went away to college at Oklahoma A&M in Stillwater for the first year there. Then the war was on, so I went to the army. Served the last year of the war in the army air corps. And after the war ended, I came back on the G.I. Bill of rights and finished my college education and graduated from TU in '49, Phi Beta Kappa.

**JE:** Wow. That's great. Let me then bring you back as a child and a teenager — what you did for entertainment and movies and all that kind of thing.

**FR:** I had a wonderful growing-up period. Wonderful childhood. Through all of my childhood I just had fun. I wanted to relive it. It was so fun. Anyway, as a child, we just played in the neighborhood. Went to school, after school we'd play around in the neighborhood and I had some exciting situation during Halloween — we lived in this small town of Humansville, and at that time, I was just 6, 7 and 8 — a little kid, but I'd follow all the bigger kids around on Halloween night. Dumping over outhouses and we pushed a farm wagon up into town and up on the steps of the community house. We had one thrilling time, when I was about 8, I think. So we just had a lot of fun growing up. I used to climb trees, hike a lot. We dug caves, finished them off, putting boards over the top and then dirt and then we'd have our secret meetings down in those caves.

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### **Chapter 03 – 5:30**

#### **Becoming a Cowboy**

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**Frank Riesinger (FR):** And then, later, for fun, we would do a lot of hiking. And I went in the Boy Scouts and was in the scouts for several years — had many exciting activities with the Boy Scouts, to summer camp and everything. And then, later, I had always wanted to be a cowboy, so we lived east of town — about half a mile east of town on Sheridan road. The town ended at the railroad tracks halfway between Yale and Sherian. There was nothing east of the railroad tracks — a few scattered houses. We lived on an acreage. There were farms and ranchers all around us — always wanted a horse, always wanted to be a cowboy. So, my dad bought me a horse and I became a cowboy and I rode all over the country from that point on on my horse. I had a buddy that had a horse and we would saddle up on a weekend and head out as far as we could get by dark and then we'd camp out in the woods somewhere east of town. And then we'd, of course, ride back into town the next day, so we had an exciting time riding. And, then, to top it all off, I was so excited about being a cowboy that when I graduated from high school in '43, I was only 16 — too young to go into the army. I wanted to serve in the army all the time I was growing up. I wanted to be a cowboy and I wanted to be a soldier. I was too young at age 16, when I graduated in '43, so I wrote several ranchers out in Wyoming to try to get a job as a cowhand. One of them answered my request and I got

a job as a cowhand in Elk Mountain, Wyoming. I got my saddle, put it in a ginny sack along with an extra shirt and blue jeans and my spurs and I caught a bus and rode up to Elk Mountain, Wyoming and signed on with this big ranch in southern Wyoming, right at the foot of Elk Mountain. And I was a cowboy for one wonderful summer of '43. We did everything — we roped, we gathered our cattle, we had our roundup [unintelligible]. And after we hand the roundup and [unintelligible], we gathered our herd together and I participate in one of the final cattle drives from our ranch down into the basin. We drive our herd into the basin for the summer passage. That was one thrilling summer there. We had our cookshacks that followed up along, just like you see in the movies. I did all the cowboying there. And, after that thrilling summer —

**John Erling (JE):** And, just let me point out again, you were 16-years-old.

**FR:** I was 16, yeah.

**JE:** Yeah.

**FR:** Yeah. I was the youngest hand on the ranch and the others were a lot older — you know, 17, 18, 19. Well, every Saturday night, if we had our work done, the foreman would let us saddle up and we'd saddle up and rode into town — into "the crossin'," we called it there in the town of Elk Mountain, tiny town. We ate there at the boarding house there. And then, they'd have a big dance every Saturday night. And at this dance — none of us danced, but anyway — we'd sit around and watch people dance and one of the ranchers there in the area has sheep. There weren't many sheep ranchers; most of us were cattle ranchers. His name was Lemkey and he had a sheep ranch. He had invited his two nieces from Wisconsin to come out to spend the summer. And, at that dance, everybody came in — all the ranchers came in with their families for that Saturday night dance — and he brought in these two nieces, which I think were about 14, 15, 16 maybe. And they were out on the dance floor dancing with the two of them by themselves. And, because they was sheep people, we wouldn't have anything to do with them. We were cowhands.

**JE:** (Chuckles)

**FR:** And so we sat around — us cowhands sat around the outside of that dance floor — and watched those two little, pretty blonde girls dance with one another and refuse to dance with them because they was sheep people. That was my first activity, first knowledge, of discrimination. (Laughs)

**JE:** (Chuckling) Yup. That's funny.

**FR:** Uh-huh. So, anyway, that was my summer of '43.

**JE:** Oh, I was hoping you'd met one of those girls and then you married her.

**FR:** Nope, no. They was sheep people! Wouldn't have anything to do with them. (Laughs)

**JE:** (Laughs)

**FR:** We was cowhands!

**JE:** (Laughing) That was funny.

**FR:** But that's the way it was, moving west.

**JE:** Right.

## Chapter 04 – 9:06

### Depression

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**John Erling (JE):** So, in the '30s, we have The Dust Bowl and The Depression.

**Frank Riesinger (FR):** (In agreement) Mm-hmm.

**JE:** Dust Bowl, the drought came in three waves — 1934, 1936; '39 to '40.

**FR:** (In agreement) Mm-hmm.

**JE:** You were 10, 11 years old then. But living in Tulsa, weren't you?

**FR:** Yes.

**JE:** So you didn't really experience the dust so much of The Dust Bowl?

**FR:** Correct; we had dust storms, but nothing like out west.

**JE:** Right.

**FR:** We were not affected by it, but we were affected by the lack of rain, because when we put in our gardens, and we'd have to water our gardens — just to get our beans to grow, our tomatoes to grow — so we'd have to water everything. And at night it was so hot during those summers that we'd move outside and sleep outside in those summer evenings. So, we experienced the heat and the drought of the '30s.

**JE:** Did you set up fans? Or did you have fans or anything?

**FR:** Well, my dad — we didn't have fans — but my dad bought an electric fan, an Emerson, and in the evening then, we'd set up the fan in the living room. It was a rotating fan and we'd set around in the living room and have that fan rotate round and hit us. (Chuckling) and during the evening, it felt so good.

**JE:** Felt so good.

**FR:** Felt so good. That was our air conditioning.

**JE:** (Chuckling) Yes. But, then, at the time in that period, the stock market crashed — October 29th, 1929, Black Tuesday, which affected Tulsa. It affected the world; not just the United States.

**FR:** Right.

**JE:** So what are your memories of that time and how did it affect your family?

**FR:** Well, my dad was a jeweler. People didn't buy jewelry. So you could imagine how his job was affected. So he had to move around and get various jobs, sometimes part-time jobs from time to time. And he then — things were going so badly, of course, we were poor. But everybody was poor. It was Depression. We didn't feel poor because everybody was the same. And many of us struggled. Some depended upon the WPA and CCC and other programs but my dad was too proud, so he just took it upon himself to provide for his family the best he could. My mom and dad worked night and day and we kids helped. And during that period, we lived in a little 1-bedroom house in Kansas City at that time, in the early part of The Depression. And Dad, how he managed it, I don't know — working part-time and so forth. He managed to get some materials and he built on three rooms on the back of that little one-bedroom house. And, as a kid, I was at that time probably 7 or 8. I would mix concrete in a wheelbarrow — mix concrete mud for him to build his rock wall for the foundation and then he built on that foundation the rest of those little 3 rooms with my uncle helping him. And he did that through the summer — I think that summer would have been the summer of '36, in the depth of The Depression. And, again, Dad could work when he could find work part-time.

**JE:** And you said he was a jeweler, did he —

**FR:** He was a jeweler.

**JE:** But did he find any other jobs beyond being a jeweler?

**FR:** No. The only other job he did was as a carpenter, adding on three rooms to the back of his house.

**JE:** But he was able to find work as a jeweler?

**FR:** Occasionally, uh-huh. Part-time, usually. He found work as a jeweler and engraver and he struggled and my mom struggled; they struggled. They did everything. I remember my dad worked, setting up nights, working, when he had work sometimes at home to do. And I would help him because he was very innovative. Because of The Depression he invented something, and I'll show them to you later if you have time; he invented

“photo trophies” out of walnut. He made a trophy. And on the trophy he would mount a figure of a sports figure and put a plate on it for engraving. And he sold these trophies to different — Lowe & Campbell was a company here in Kansas City that bought those trophies and sold them to schools. These trophies were given to schools for sports contests, and he made those trophies, sold them to Lowe & Campbell, and I can show the circulars on those if you have time. And that’s how he supported himself in addition to the part-time jewelry engraving work he could get. So, I remember working with my dad, sitting up nights, sanding those walnut pieces of the trophies and then he would assemble them, finish them with lacquer, and finish them — and it was a photo trophy with the top with an area for the photo to go into the top of the trophy of the winning team. And that’s how we made it through The Depression.

**JE:** Your father was very innovative. So, did you ever think that you went wanting for food?

**FR:** Never.

**JE:** Did you ever go to bed hungry?

**FR:** Never.

**JE:** Because he worked so hard.

**FR:** Because we worked together as a family; we all four worked together. We didn’t have time to do anything except work and provide for what we had. But we never suffered, because my dad always worked.

**JE:** Yeah.

**FR:** Night and day.

**JE:** You worked for your dad? You worked selling magazines or anything like that?

**FR:** Yeah, how’d you know about that?

**JE:** I don’t know.

**FR:** You knew. This was in Humansville. In Humansville, I was in 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grade there. From the big town of Springfield, the Saturday Evening Post dealer would bring magazines up to me there in Humansville — probably 15 or 20. And I sold Saturday Evening Post for a nickel, and for each one I sold, I earned a penny. And I would sell 3 or 4 or 5 every Saturday. He’d bring ‘em up on Friday and I’d sell them Friday and Saturday in downtown Humansville. People didn’t have much money then. We did a lot of bartering there. My dad and his little jewelry shop there was about 6 feet wide and about 12 feet deep on Main St. He didn’t sell much of anything but he did watch repairs, clock repairs, and every once in a while

he'd sell a dollar watch. We had dollar watches. Ingrahm dollar watches. And he'd sell maybe a watch strap — they were pocket watches back then; everything was pocket watches. He'd sell a leather-woven lanyard that people used to hook onto their overalls and drop into their pocket — sold those for about a dollar. So his big sales were usually about a dollar. And once in a while, he would get a sale — and he really had no inventory — and most of his work was repair work, and he would barter. So someone would bring in a ham, dad would give him a clock repair job for a ham — trade for a ham. Well, that was barter back then because nobody had any money. The little bank across the street closed shortly after we moved there and nobody got anything out of it. I think Dad had \$250.00 in the bank and never got it back because the bank never reopened.

**JE:** (Commiserating) Mmm.

**FR:** Banks closed all around the country. The little banks never reopened but some of the bigger banks, of course, reopened later. The bank holiday, I think, in '33 — do you remember?

**JE:** I think so. But that was a lot of money, \$250.00.

**FR:** It was my dad's lifetime fortune. It's all he had. So, things were tough for those 3 years.

**JE:** But he was fortunate to have a craft, wasn't he?

**FR:** He was fortunate to be a craftsman.

**JE:** Right.

## **Chapter 05 – 6:02**

### **Tulsa Movie Theaters**

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**John Erling (JE):** How did your father get into the jewelry business in the first place?

**Frank Riesinger (FR):** At the age of 14, his father was a baker, there in Kansas City. And he found out that jewelers could make 10 dollars a week. So he wanted his son to have it better than he did as a baker, so he took his son — Otto, my dad — down to a jewelry shop and apprenticed him at age 14 to be a jeweler and jewelry engraver. And that's when he started, at age 14. And, then, of course, he was a jewelry engraver and die-cutter. He learned die-cutting. I'll show you the dies that he cut. And we made clasp pins out

of those dies later in life, here in Tulsa. So he did that work as a jewelry engraver and then made trophies during The Depression; and then after The Depression ended — The Depression ended for us in '38 when my dad got his first full-time job in 1938, so The Depression was, actually, for our family, was from about '31 to '38.

**JE:** (In agreement) Mhhmm. What was his first full-time job?

**FR:** As a jewelry engraver with Boswell's Jewelry in downtown Tulsa.

**JE:** Oh, okay.

**FR:** An old time — the finest jewelers in downtown Tulsa. A.Y. Boswell was.

**JE:** So when you came back from Kansas City, then, and came to Tulsa — when was that?

**FR:** We came back to Tulsa in '38. He worked for A.Y. Boswell and then he worked for F.C. Zielger, another jeweler, for awhile; and then, in '41 — December 1st of '41, 7 days before Pearl Harbor, he dedicated to go back in business for himself and he set up a shop to do jewelry engraving for the trade, for the other jewelers in town. So he set up his shop in the Calumet building — no longer there — between 3rd and 4th on the west side of the street in the center of the block between 3rd and 4th, second floor of the Calumet building. He set up his shop there in December 1st of '41 where he did trade work for all of the jewelry stores in town. They'd send their engraving work for him to do and on the side, then, he would do some jewelry work for private customers out of that little shop — jewelry repairs and made some special-order jewelry for customers during that period. And that was in '41 and then in '44 he moved from there to the Orpheum Theater building, above the Orpheum Theater — the 4th floor of the Orpheum Theater building. He continued his work there — go ahead.

**JE:** And where was The Orpheum located?

**FR:** On 4th street on the south side of the street between Main and Boston. The Orpheum Theater was the major theater in downtown Tulsa for many years.

**JE:** Yeah.

**FR:** Okay?

**JE:** With him upstairs —

**FR:** Him upstairs.

**JE:** ... you went to many movies, then, didn't you?

**FR:** Well, yeah, we went to movies all the time. Yeah. (Chuckles)

**JE:** Right. You remember some of the movies there that had the stars?

**FR:** Oh, yeah. Went to all the John Wayne movies, Will Rogers movies, and, oh yeah, went to a movie every — every Saturday I would go to a movie. In Humansville, it cost a nickel, but when we moved to Tulsa it cost a dime to get in the movies. I had a nickel-a-week allowance and so I used my nickel to attend movies both in Humansville and Kansas City and then in Tulsa starting in '38.

**JE:** When you went upstairs, to your father's shop upstairs...

**FR:** Yes.

**JE:** ... could you hear the movie sounds up through the floor?

**FR:** No.

**JE:** Can you describe the inside of The Orpheum Theater, what it was like?

**FR:** It was fabulous. It was almost like a museum. It had — on the walls, they had loges seats on the walls where people could sit in those loges. And then they had a balcony and it was luscious. There was also another one down the street one block: The Ritz which had the same accouterments and they already had, in The Ritz, lights in the ceiling that would come on and off like stars in the ceiling. And it was just as luxuriant as The Orpheum was — two luxuriant downtown theaters and we loved to go there because it was a beautiful place to go.

**JE:** Were they competing with each other? Was it —

**FR:** Oh, yeah. Two — actually, four downtown theaters: The Orpheum, The Ritz, the Majestic and The Rialto were all owned by the same owner.

**JE:** All four of them?

**FR:** All four, yes.

**JE:** Oh, wow.

**FR:** Those were the four downtown theaters all owned by —

**JE:** Owned by one man.

**FR:** (In agreement) Mhmm.

**JE:** Interesting.

**FR:** (In agreement) Mhmm.

**JE:** Well, he wanted competition, then, didn't he? He owned 'em all.

**FR:** Owned 'em all. Had no competition. Now there were a couple outlying movies — The Delman came on later and then The Will Rogers later, and The Tower, later. But those were the four downtown movies that everyone went to, came downtown to go to the movies, you know. And all of the major movies started at The Ritz and The Orpheum — the first-run movies. And then the other two showed later runs.

**JE:** Okay. Yeah. What a fun, fun time for you.

**FR:** Oh, it was a fun time.

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**Chapter 06 – 6:35**  
**December 7, 1941**

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**John Erling (JE):** So, 1941 then — December 7th — what do you remember about that Sunday?

**Frank Riesinger (FR):** We were sitting at home that Sunday morning and having breakfast. We lived on Sheridan road — 7th and Sheridan road — we didn't have the radio on for some reason. We didn't play the radio usually on Sundays. We just listened to the radio at nights. So, for some reason, we didn't have it on but somehow or another — I don't know why — we turned on the radio and found out that the attack had just taken place at Pearl Harbor. And we didn't understand what was going on. "Pearl Harbor? Where's that?" Nobody knows where Pearl Harbor is. But then they said Hawaii and we knew where Hawaii was. And, so, we wondered about that at the time. "That's Japan! That's way over there. That won't amount to anything. Japan's way over there." We and everyone thought that wouldn't amount to anything. "Take care of that within a month or two." Little did we know that it would last for 44 months and one week; but that was the idea or the thinking of most people — it wasn't to be much. But, when the war continued, and they started drafting people, we got the impression that this was a real war. And, of course, I thought, well, before that I had always wanted to be a soldier. I had applied to Westpoint back when I was 14. I got all of the applications, necessitated to get an appointment from a congressman. I had test scores from previous applications — tests to look over. And I thought "Oh, boy, that's going to be really tough." I wanted to go to Westpoint; I wanted to be a cavalryman — cavalry officer. They had just sold all their horses so I wasn't to be a cavalryman. So, anyway, the early part of the war, I continued in high school because ...

**JE:** Well, you were 15-years-old in 1941.

**FR:** Yes. Yeah. I thought "Well, it's probably not going to last long enough for me to get in," so I didn't have any idea that I would serve. So, anyway, as the war went on, we found out it was growing. In to our minds, it really is a war.

But, anyway, I finished high school. High school — we had an idea that the boys there would have to go to the service. Those who were in their senior year were allowed to finish their senior year if they were 18, so they went off to war, and they'd come back and visit us. And, then, after I graduated in '43, I went on to A&M, My first year in A&M, I had told ya, I was in ROTC there, so I had basic training, basically in the ROTC there in A&M and then after my year at A&M, I came home and I picked up working for Dad while I was waiting for the call to service, which was in December. I was working for my dad then at 6 or 8 months when I got my call to active service in December '44.

**JE:** So, then, when you entered the service, what branch of the service did you join?

**FR:** Army Air Corps.

**JE:** And you wanted to be a pilot?

**FR:** Yes, uh-huh.

**JE:** Alright. So how did that go?

**FR:** I qualified for all four of the positions — you'd get Stanines (Standard NINEs) at that time — barber pilot, fighter pilot, navigator, bombardier. I qualified for all four but my highest qualification was navigator. So, I was destined to be, and train, as a navigator.

**JE:** And what did that position do? What did you do as a navigator?

**FR:** I did not — because, at that time, the war was winding down. When I got called to active service after basic, I did not go to navigator's school because that was — schools were backing up and I did not go to navigators school, so they assigned us to various positions throughout different airfields throughout the nation. August 5th, I was on a train. I had been given orders to report to Scott Field, St. Louis. On the train, coming through, I had to ask my captain: "Train's going right through Tulsa; can I get a delay in route to stop off there for a few days?" It was granted. But, as our train traveled, we came into El Paso on August 5th, of '45. You'll remember the date. August 5th, they came on the train and said, "They've dropped the bomb..." We didn't know what they were talking about. Because the Manhattan Project was so secret, not even Truman knew about it until the last few months, after he took over from Roosevelt. It was so secret. So, we didn't know what they were talking about. The train continued on, I got back home in Tulsa the next day — found out it was the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. And, then, three days later, the Japs didn't surrender. They gave 'em three days. Three days later they dropped

the bomb on Nagasaki. And, you remember those casualties: 70,000 in Hiroshima; 43,000 in Nagasaki. After Nagasaki, the cabinet — Japanese cabinet — worked day and night trying to decide whether to continue the war until the 14th, and then, there was a cable from the Japanese cabinet to the Swiss embassy. The Swiss embassy — we had no contact with Japan. The Swiss embassy cabled the president, and on August 14th, he got the cable and at 6:58 that evening, he got on the radio and announced that the Japs have surrendered. The war is over.

**JE:** Yeah.

## **Chapter 07 – 9:40**

### **V-J Day in Tulsa**

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**Frank Riesinger (FR):** I happened to be in downtown Tulsa, in the 4th floor of the Orpheum building, when we found out. The windows were open, we didn't have air conditioning at that time. This is August 14th; this is about 4 o' clock in the afternoon. Apparently it had leaked because people started shouting, horns started honking, trace paper started coming down like snow. Somebody busted into our 4th floor office and said "The Japs have surrendered! The war is over!" And so I and my four-year-old brother took the elevator down and went out on the street in front of The Orpheum theater building and celebrated. The town exploded! Everyone! Every city in the entire nation exploded with celebrations! We were out in the middle of the street — cars started going up and down Main and Boston and 4th Street — and people celebrated. The biggest celebration in the city of Tulsa — biggest impromptu celebration in the history of this city. The war was over. And it was so thrilling, John, I can't tell ya how thrilled we were.

**John Erling (JE):** Yeah. And the emotion that you have right now —

**FR:** Yeah.

**JE:** ... all these years later.

**FR:** Yeah. I was prepared to invade Japan. I was ready to go, ya know, when you're 17, 18 — you wanna kill every Kraut and every Jap single-handedly. But, I didn't have to go.

**JE:** There it was.

**FR:** Anyway, I survived the war because of dropping the bombs. Now, had the bombs not worked, we were prepared to invade November 1st.

**JE:** Yeah.

**FR:** 14 divisions would have invaded Kyushu, the southernmost island from Okinawa — the last island we took. Forty. Up to 40 were prepared, if necessary, to invade Honshu, the main island of Japan, where Tokyo is located. But, the invasion never took place, because they surrendered.

**JE:** Tell me about the party. Did it continue all night and into the next day?

**FR:** Well, all night — that evening, we got tired of celebrating and came home that evening. We probably celebrated up past midnight in downtown Tulsa.

**JE:** And you were 19-years-old.

**FR:** Yeah, I was 19 at that time.

**JE:** Right, right, right. So, then, officially, then, the victory over Japan — “V-J Day” as it was known — was on August 14th. And, I guess that was the day — August 15th, too, maybe?

**FR:** No, this was August 14th, that was it.

**JE:** That was it.

**FR:** Well, it was August 15th in Japan.

**JE:** Yeah.

**FR:** Time signal difference.

**JE:** Right.

**FR:** Now, two weeks later, then, the official signature — the signing, the surrender took place in Tokyo Bay on the battleship Missouri. Two weeks later, September 1st — September 1st here, September 2nd there — and on the battleship Missouri, it was about a 30-minute ceremony, the Japanese envoys came on board. Nimitz and MacArthur were there on board. You’ve seen the pictures. And I’ve got the pictures on the walls if you want to look at them again. And it took less than 30 minutes for them to sign the surrender; and that was September 1st. But that day was not celebrated here — it was not a celebration here. It was celebrated on August 14th the day the Japs surrendered.

**JE:** You make me wish that I was in Tulsa celebrating with you on that day.

**FR:** Oh, you would have loved to have been there. It would be worth a million dollars to have been there.

**JE:** Yeah. What a great memory.

**FR:** And I have — you’ll see my pictures on the wall, where I was, at that moment. And you’ll see the pictures in downtown New York that you’ve already seen.

**JE:** Yes, yeah.

**FR:** And you'll see the picture —

**JE:** But I've never talked to somebody, like you, who experienced V-J Day in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

**FR:** Because everybody's dead (Laughing)! I was the only serviceman I knew that was home on leave that day — the only one I've ever ... Now, I'll take it back. We found out later there was a sailor at the depot at that time. That sailor celebrated there, I'm sure, or he may have come up town. But, anyway, I was the only serviceman to celebrate in downtown Tulsa.

**JE:** Tell me some of the other stores that were in downtown Tulsa at the time. Any clothing stores? Can you remember other stores?

**FR:** Oh, well, yeah. Let's see. Vanderver's and Brown-Dunkins were the two major stores. Brown-Dunkins you'll see in the picture of me — Brown-Dunkins was right down at the corner of 4th and Main. Vanderver's was over on 5th street — remember? Okay, so, those were the two major stores. There was S.G. Holmes, there was Palace Clothiers, there were a lot of more minor stores that were in business at that time. And, of course, Riesinger's Jewelers up at the 4th floor of the Orpheum building. We didn't have a big store at that time, but, at that time, we were doing some retail business in that little shop up on the 4th floor. 411 Orpheum Building.

**JE:** Yeah. That's so great. (Chuckling) That's a great memory. So, then, that celebration. And, then, what happens to you then? What do you do?

**FR:** Well, after celebration I had to report to my base in Scott Field. So, that was the 14th, so, two days later I had to report to Scott Field. And, of course, the war was over. They had us go to teletype school. I don't know why. But, anyway, I never did get there so we just waited around there for a few days — for a few months there — in Scott Field, marking time until they decided to discharge everyone that was stateside first, to get rid of us, so that those who were overseas could be discharged later. So, I was last-in-first-out. So, I didn't join until July of '44 and I was discharged — I'd have to look at my discharge — I think it was November 8th of '45. I was discharged in Scott Field and came home.

**JE:** And that's, then, when you went to school — went back to A&M.

**FR:** Went back to A&M after the war on the G.I. Bill. (In agreement) Mhmm.

**JE:** And, so, you went there and then you graduated from the University of Tulsa.

**FR:** Well, okay, I went back to school to A&M. I had changed my major. I was going to be a great chemist when I — and I was within 30 hours of a degree in chemistry, but, after being way in the service, I had a different

interest: I wanted to be a plant breeder. So, I transferred when I came back. Plant breeder — plant genetics, plant genetics. Wonder what that is, don't you? How you inherit something, that's called "genetics."

**JE:** Yes.

**FR:** Yes.

**JE:** But I thought you —

**FR:** No, I wanted to be a plant breeder, breeding crops — breeding crops in an experiment station.

**JE:** You're talking about plants.

**FR:** Plants, yeah. Plant breeder.

**JE:** Plant breeder?

**FR:** Plant breeder, yeah.

**JE:** Okay. Alright. Now — okay, now I've got it.

**FR:** Plant breeder. Geneticist. Yeah, uh-huh.

**JE:** Wow!

**FR:** So, when I had a new interest — I didn't think I'd make a good chemist anyway. After the war, I had a new interest: plant genetics. So, I transferred into the school of agriculture when I went back to A&M; and then I was within 30 hours of a degree in plant genetics. And, for some reason, John, I decided that didn't work for the government. Most of the jobs would have been in experiment stations for the state or federal government. For some reason, I didn't want to work for the government and I was doing well, but I decided — and I said to Dad — "Would you allow me to come back and finish my apprenticeship and work for you?" And he jumped at the chance because he saw the chance to continue the business. He said "Yes!" So, after giving up my future as a plant breeder, I returned to my roots, where I had started my apprenticeship at age 14 and picked up my apprenticeship and worked for Dad, and transferred to the University of Tulsa — went into the school of business administration — and, as I worked for my degree in business administration, I went to school in the mornings and worked as an apprentice, working for Dad, afternoons, and I did that until the spring of '49. And then I graduated from TU, Phi Beta Kappa, and with a degree in business administration, and then finished working for my dad for the next 52 years.

**JE:** (Chuckles)

**FR:** Well, he died, though, in the meantime. But I was a jeweler, an active jeweler, then, for 52 years.

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**Chapter 08 – 16:55**  
**Frank Meets Thomas**

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**John Erling (JE):** So, Frank, there's somebody that's famous around the world, and particularly in Tulsa, that you got to meet. Tell us from the very beginning how it is you met him.

**Frank Riesinger (FR):** I was going to the University of Tulsa, sitting in a class, and the guy sitting next to me, who I knew just as a classmate — not very well. Out of the blue, he just said, "You want my girl?" I looked at him, I didn't know what he was talking about. He says, "I'm tired of her. You want my girl?" Well, at that time, I wasn't girlin'. I didn't have a girlfriend. So, I just flew off: "Yes!" So, he says, "Okay! She lives way out in the sticks. You'll have a hard time finding her — finding where she lives — but I'll explain to you, I want to introduce you to her." So, we got on the phone — either that day or maybe a day or two later, I don't remember. He got her on the phone and he said, "Suzie, I want you to meet a friend of mine." And, so, I got on the phone. I said, "Hello, I'm Frank Riesinger." She says "I'm Suzie." And I said, "Nice to meet you." And we had a conversation for a few minutes and made a hit. And I said, "May I come out and meet you?" And she said, "Yes, you'll have a hard time finding where I live. I live way out in the sticks. Way out northwest of Tulsa. You'll have a hard time, but I'll explain to you how to get there." So, she explained how to get there, and we made the date, and I found it — by a lot of trouble. I found this house up on the hill — it was so dark. So, I drove up this gravel drive-up around the front of this house, went up on the front porch, knocked on the front door, and this guy comes to the door and he says, "What do you want?" And I kind of stepped back a minute and said, "Well, I'm here to meet Suzie." He says, "Oh. She's not ready." Girls are never ready, you know. So he grabbed me by the hand, he says, "Come here, I want to show you something." He took me by the hand, took me in the front way there, and we turned left into the dining room, which was piled high with all of the Remington bronzes — I think 27 of them. He had piled them there and had stuff all over his house. He had moved, closed down the museum in San Antone, and had moved everything up to Tulsa, and outside the house — I saw later — where he had the foundations for his new museum, which he was building. Anyway, he had moved up everything from San Antone, had it piled around in his

house; also, in a storage building, out to the west of the house, the storage building that his wife had used when she had her artwork out there. He had that piled high with all of his stuff from this museum in San Antone. Anyway, I was polite. I didn't even know what bronzes were. But he says, "I just got them from the Cole collection." And I acted real interested and acted real polite because I wanted to meet Suzie. So, after maybe 5, 10, or 15 minutes, Suzie comes down the stairs, and she was awfully pretty. She's a dark-haired girl, pretty dress; and I met her, shook hands with her, and we made a hit, and we talked for a few minutes. He said "I want to show you something else," and she said, "Can we go out for a Coke?" And he says, "Okay, but you need to come back." (Laughing). So, we went out somewhere for a Coke.

**JE:** You're talking to Thomas Gilcrease.

**FR:** Yeah. This happened to be Thomas Gilcrease. I didn't know who it was at the time; I didn't even know the name. But, anyway...

**JE:** And the house is the house that's there now: The Gilcrease House.

**FR:** His house. His home on the — that he had bought. He had bought the house; one day he had bought the house. He was travelling with either Barton or Junior and they saw this house being built on the road. Anyway, he had bought this house and they were living there, now, he and Suzie and Des Cygne. And, anyway, the rest of the story then. We went out for a Coke, we came back after an hour or two, and he wanted to show me the rest of the stuff; and, of course, I was polite and acted like I was interested. I didn't know what bronzes were. But, anyway, I acted interested — I was in college, you know. I should be knowledgeable and interested. So, after showing me around for awhile I finally got away from him and Suze and I talked for awhile and I asked her, "Suze, can I come back and see you again?" And she said, "Yes." So, after that first meeting between Suzie and Tom, why, I did come back and I come back many times over a period of probably 2, or 3, or 4 months; I don't remember. That was — what year was that? That would have been ...

**JE:** In the '40s. Late '40s.

**FR:** Yeah, in the late '40s would be.

**JE:** '48, '49...

**FR:** Yeah, that would be '47, yeah. Okay. I left and came and again I said, "Can I come back again?" So I made another date with her. So, she and I dated over a period of a couple-three-or-four months. I don't remember now; it's been — all the time I'd date her I'd wander around the acreage there, in

and out of the construction site. Tom had just started the footing and the foundation for the new museum there and we played around there and had some good times. Took pictures and everything and we went out to several formal dances. I've shown John here the picture of she and I at a formal dance at The Tulsa Club. We went to several formal dances, and after a while, we kind of got disinterested and broke off our get-togethers and I left, but before I left, I had taken pictures out in front of the house of she and I, and some of just me.

**JE:** Who were those pictures of there?

**FR:** Pictures of me in front of Tom's house.

**JE:** Yeah.

**FR:** Now, there were other pictures that Tom took of Suzie and me, but I have a story to tell about those. I'll make it quick. Several years went by. This was '47. I met Bobbie in '50, married her in '53. In '54, she was pregnant with my — our first child, my son. And I came home from work one day, and we were living in Brookside, in a little apartment there, and she came to the screen door. There was a hole in the screen door. And, as I approached the front door, I tried to open the front door, she had it locked. She started tearing up pictures and poking them through the hole in the screen door — pictures of Suzie and me that had been taken. And, so, finally, after she got them all torn off, and I gathered them up and threw them in the wastebasket, she let me in. But (laughing) —

**JE:** Was she a bit jealous?

**FR:** (Laughing) I guess she was a bit jealous!

**JE:** (In agreement) Mhmm.

**FR:** These were pictures I'd just had brought when we'd gotten married. I just brought pictures of things to the house and to the apartment. She had pictures of her boyfriends, too, but I didn't tear them up. But, anyway, that was my experience with her pictures, which I don't have. But I do have pictures I'm showing to John of me, alone, in front of the house and I don't know how she missed this big picture — 8 by 10 — of Suzie and me at the formal dance.

**JE:** What ever happened to Suzie?

**FR:** That we don't know. It's a real mystery. Now, Suzie was a ward of Thomas's. At the same time that I dated Suzie, she was living with her sister in the big bedroom upstairs — you've probably seen the windows of the big ... — she and Suzie shared that big bedroom. And Des Cygne, who was Miss America's daughter — Miss America of '26, the year I was born. Miss

America '26, Norma Smallwood, had married Tom after he'd divorced his first wife from whom Barton and Thomas were born, and then after he married Miss America, Norma Smallwood, at that time, I never met Des Cygne. I heard how beautiful she was because another friend of mine who went to TU with me, Phil Smith, and his mother were close friends of Tom and Des Cygne — visited back and forth. So I knew about Des Cygne. I'd seen pictures of her; always kind of wanted to meet her. But, anyway, she was away at college at TU, a freshman there, and I never did see her. She never did come home on any of the times when I dated Suzie, so I never saw her. But, anyway, years later, then, the rest of the story is we discontinued seeing one another on good terms, and I never saw her again. Never saw Tom again after that. Many years later, in '68, Tom had died in '62, Norma — Miss America '26 — had died in '66, and this was in '68. In '68, I was standing at the back of our jewelry store, Riesinger's Jewelry Store in Utica Square, at the back of the store with my wife, Bobbie. And, in the front door, walks this beautiful black-haired lady, and she walks towards me, and as she walked towards me she said, "Are you Frank Riesinger?" She had a clue, my sign was on the marquee outside. I said, "Yes. Are you Des Cygne Gilcrease?" She said, "Yes." We shook hands and she smiled and said, "Frank, I always wanted to date you. But I thought you were too stuck up." (Chuckling) I said, "Des Cygne, I wanted to date you but I thought you were too stuck up!" So, anyway, we laughed about that. The three of us had a conversation for probably a quarter — maybe a half an hour and talked old times, and then she left. She was on her way. She had come up to Tulsa for a board — she and Barton and Junior were on the board of Gilcrease. She'd come up for a board meeting. And I thought she drove home from that point back to San Antone. I found out that she was killed in an automobile accident on a freeway in San Antone. I thought it was that day or the day after.

**JE:** Wow.

**FR:** But, anyway, I never knew about her in between or up to that time. But, then, guess what? Last week, I went to a celebration of the groundbreaking of the new museum. They had torn down Tom's museum that I watched being built.

**JE:** Yep.

**FR:** And I cried buckets. I went to the groundbreaking. Mrs. Neil was good enough to allow me to come to the groundbreaking. I got there early, about 2 hours early, and I met the four surviving Gilcreases. I met 2 of the

Gilcreases and 2 of the Denny's. Des Cygne had divorced her first husband and had married Thomas Denny, an oilman from also San Antone. At the celebration of the groundbreaking then, I picked up the real story. I met 2 Gilcreases and 2 Denny's. The Gilcreases are Thomas Eugene Gilcrease and Gene Gilcrease. And the two Denny's, I forget their first names. I met those 4 — talked with them at this groundbreaking ceremony for over an hour, maybe, and then we walked down and celebrated — walked down to Tom's mausoleum there and we saluted Tom's mausoleum there and walked around it for awhile. Came back up and had the celebration there at the ceremony. The mayor was there and I was sitting with the 4 Gilcreases with Chief Running Bear, Chief of the Osage Nation; he gave the invocation. And, then, I was sitting with the 4 Gilcrease guys there. The groundbreaking ceremony was about to begin. The mayor was in the center, and I said to the 4 Gilcreases: "You guys have to go in and go up and grab a shovel." They said, "We're not going up. You go up!" So, instead of them going up, I went up and grabbed a shovel on the end and the mayor was in the center and I was on the end of the groundbreaking ceremony since I had been there when they had broken ground — or had built the first museum. I thought "Aww, to be in on it..."

**JE:** And this groundbreaking just happened several weeks ago.

**FR:** It just happened several weeks ago.

**JE:** So, again about Tom. He was very nice to you ...

**FR:** Oh! Very nice! Very nice. Uh-huh.

**JE:** ... but he was also kind of reclusive, wasn't he?

**FR:** Yes. He was not a big personality but he was plain. Soft-spoken. But he was very nice.

**JE:** You saw all these Remingtons. Did you remember seeing any artwork?

**FR:** Oh, yeah. Around stacks in the house, yeah. That whole house was stacked with it and where Norma — his wife, Normal Smallwood, Miss America — did her artwork out in the barracks outside the house. Later, that barracks was turned into a barracks for several Indian boys who Tom was also taking care of. They were wards of his like Suzie was a ward of his at the time. And, so, all of this stuff was there while they were building the museum. And, everytime I'd go out to see Suzie, Tom would always come to the door, and was very polite, and always wanted to show me more stuff, and I wasn't interested in his stuff (chuckling). I was interested in Suzie! But, later, it became the greatest museum — Western museum — in this part of the nation.

**JE:** There was a carriage house there that became part of the museum.

**FR:** Yes.

**JE:** I don't know if you remember that or not, but I was told recently that part of the entrance was actually part of the carriage house.

**FR:** Okay.

**JE:** And you're the only one in town, now, who has a memory of Thomas Gilcrease that we can talk to.

**FR:** That we know about. Uh-huh.

**JE:** Yeah. And I thank you for sharing that with us. That was great.

**FR:** It was great to know him, great to know Miss America's daughter, Des Cygne.

**JE:** Did you ever meet Norma Smallwood?

**FR:** No. Never did meet her. They divorced, you know, when Des Cygne was 5, I think, they divorced. It was a terrible, terrible divorce; I have all of the papers — and I would show them to you, but they are very sordid and it was a sordid divorce. It was terrible.

**JE:** Yep.

**FR:** And she died in '66. He died in '62. Norma died in '66 and Des Cygne in '68. She died — now, I was corrected by one of the Gilcreases that she didn't die that day that I met her. It was a week later, because, he said, "She and I flew up from San Antone for the meeting of the board and we stayed in the Mayo Hotel and after that we drove home, and it was a week later after you met her, Frank, that she died in that auto collision in San Antone."

**JE:** Yeah. Okay. Thank you for sharing it. We have it.

**FR:** You have it!

**JE:** Voices of Oklahoma is the only one who has that story.

**FR:** (Laughing) That we know of.

**JE:** No, yeah, okay.

**FR:** Someone may come up later.

**JE:** Unless somebody can prove it, this is it. Alright.

**FR:** It's a great story.

**JE:** Thank you.

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**Chapter 09 – 12:00**  
**Reisinger's**

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**Frank Riesinger (FR):** Well, fast-forward to '52.

**John Erling (JE):** Okay.

**FR:** In '52, my dad decided — we were 4th floor of the Orpheum building — he decided he wanted to have his own store. He'd always wanted a fine store. So, in '52 — in '51, '52 — we prepared to design a store in Utica Square. He kept his shop in the 4th floor of the Orpheum building and we were in Utica Square at the far-east end. The Utica Square opened in the spring of '52. Our building was not completed until December of '52 when we opened our shop there. I opened the shop there, the store, in Utica Square; that's the first time we'd had a retail store. Dad maintained his shop downtown in the Orpheum building and I operated the new store in the east end of the square, which was in the bowling alley building at the east of Utica Square. We were at the south end of the bowling alley building. We closed it '84.

**JE:** Why did you close it?

**FR:** That's a good question. Probably shouldn't have because, after we closed the store — when my dad died my wife joined me in the jewelry business. She had always come in and helped out during Christmas time, so she joined me in the jewelry business when my dad died. And she worked with me and was so interested that she applied with the gemological society and got all of her diplomas from the gemological society. She became a graduate gemologist and I have all of her certificates. I did not. I did not. I was not a graduate gemologist, but she was, and she worked with me from the time that Dad died — shortly before he died — until we finally closed our second store in '03. Now, I have to give you the background of that because we closed in '84 and then I pursued my plant breeding work. I went to work for Bill Holman — Holman Feed Farm up in Collinsville for 4 years as a seed analyst. That was my love back in the olden days. I went back to that. Then I developed back trouble loading seeds in addition to being a seed analyst. We'd have to load 50 and 60-pound sacks and I was too old for that, so that got to me — to my back. And, so, after 4 years of working as a seed analyst with Bill Holman, I was talked into going back into business, so we set up another business then — Bobby and I — in the farm shopping center and we worked there in the farm shopping center in '03 when we closed that store. It was on a limited basis. It was a limited store. We had a retail store there and we did everything we did when we had our big store in Utica Square, but in a smaller space for those years

until we closed that in '03, and that was my final retirement — 52 years of active work in the jewelry business. And, since then, I've been doing an occasional special-order work for some of my old customers and have done many jewelry appraisals — and still do. I did a special order job for a customer last week. I took in a job; he had an aqua that had been worn over the years, so I took it in from him. I don't do stone re-polishing, so I took the job in and sent it in to a lapidary to have the stone polished for him, so I did that job last week for a customer. So I'm still in the business, sort of, and occasionally do a jewelry appraisal. Over the years from '41 to now, we've done thousands of jewelry appraisals. Most of the jewelry appraisals done in the city of Tulsa were done by my father and me and my wife.

**JE:** (In agreement) Hmm!

**FR:** And I've copies of all those appraisals out in files in the garage.

**JE:** What brands of watches and all were you selling in Riesinger's?

**FR:** Okay. We sold Elton & Hamilton and a few other watches, but we never sold any of the prestige watches like Rolex.

**JE:** Why is that?

**FR:** We couldn't get the franchise.

**JE:** Who sold Rolex?

**FR:** Let's see. There were several in town who sold Rolex. Boswell did at one time. And then, I think, did Moody's get Rolex? I think they did. Uh-huh. Now, I also worked for Moody's for a short time after I closed the store.

**JE:** Before you went to the farm. You worked for Moody Jewelry for a while. Did you know Mr. Moody?

**FR:** Yes. I grew up with him. He was in my class in school. He got TB and had to leave and go to the sanatorium, so he graduated a year later from me because he spent a year in the TB sanatorium, so I knew him since high school days.

**JE:** Yeah. I actually knew him, too.

**FR:** Did you know him?

**JE:** Yeah.

**FR:** (In agreement) Uh-huh. Okay.

**JE:** I think he sold jewelry out of the trunk of his car.

**FR:** Correct. Until he had his 3 stores.

**JE:** Right.

**FR:** Yeah.

**JE:** Yeah, that was a good story, too.

**FR:** And I worked for him for a short time after we closed our store.

**JE:** You made a lot of people happy, didn't you, with jewelry and weddings and all that?

**FR:** Pleased a lot of people, yes. That was a thrilling part of the business, too — please young couples.

**JE:** Come in and choose that diamond.

**FR:** Choose the diamond, uh-huh. And, in many cases, they chose it together. In some cases, the guy would buy a diamond and present it to her. But, in most cases, they would both come in.

**JE:** It was special for people to be able to buy and to buy at Riesinger's, because you had a good reputation.

**FR:** See, they knew that we knew quality and we had a diamond scope, under which they could examine the diamond.

**JE:** There you have one over on your desk right now.

**FR:** Right there at the desk, uh-huh. So they could examine and know just as much about the diamond as we did by looking at the scope with us.

**JE:** Where did you get your diamonds in those days?

**FR:** Well, they're all imported, of course, from Africa. So we had dealers — New York dealers — who would send them in, who would acquire them from the syndicates in Europe or Africa. And we would have the diamonds sent in, of course — registered mail. We'd examine them under the scope — 30-power magnification — for impurities; and you'd examine for color and perfection grade and grade them, and report the grade to the individual, and let them buy as fine a diamond as they could afford.

**JE:** Yeah. What were diamonds selling for back then?

**FR:** Well, they were not as high as they are now, but throughout the period, they, of course, increased in price. Throughout the years we sold them they increased in price over the years, so it depends upon what period you're talking about.

**JE:** In that period of time, in the '50s and '60s; you could buy a good diamond for how much?

**FR:** Oh, well (chuckles). You could spend any amount — any amount from a few hundred dollars to several thousand dollars.

**JE:** Right.

**FR:** But the prices ranged. See, diamonds became graded very accurately back in those days with the GIA system of grading and, so, as you bought a diamond — if you bought it from us, or anyone equally qualified — you would buy it based on what you see in the diamond as impurities or

inclusions and you'd have to depend upon us to discern the color, how much yellow was involved in it. If it was clear or blue-ish-clear, it commanded a higher price than if it was yellow-ish or brownish. And there are a number of different grades under the GIA, Gemological Institute of America, system of grading. And many of our customers were interested in the grading system and wanted to buy as fine a diamond as they could afford. So that was our job: to help them buy the finest diamond they could afford the price they had to spend.

**JE:** But you had people from all walks of life.

**FR:** All walks of life, yep.

**JE:** You had the very wealthy in Tulsa come to you.

**FR:** Had the very wealthy to the very poor.

**JE:** Yeah.

**FR:** Correct.

**JE:** Did you ever — you knew somebody didn't have much money but they sure wanted that diamond for their bride. Did you ever cut the price or do anything like that?

**FR:** No, we never cut a price. We always priced based on our costs — a very nominal markup over our costs. But if they had a price to spend, we'd go down into a quality level and size at the price they had to spend.

**JE:** Did you ever do a layaway plan?

**FR:** No.

**JE:** Yeah. And charging, and, of course, we didn't have credit cards — all cash?

**FR:** Most of the time, we'd have Visa and MasterCard. So, we let the companies cover the rest. We had a few individual charges but that proved to be very unwise over a time and so we went to an altogether dependence on Visa and MasterCard and American Express, where there were no risks involved to us.

**JE:** Right.

**FR:** We always priced our diamonds less — for less money — and more exactly than other jewelers. Most other jewelers did not have our background and experience in grading that we did, so people that were very careful and exacting would come to us that wanted to get the finest diamond they could buy for the lowest price.

**JE:** You had a great reputation because of your background —

**FR:** Because of our background.

**JE:** And you brought that to the table more so than ...

**FR:** We brought that to the table. See, we were the finest jewelers in town. We were the only store that had a complete shop where we made our jewelry completely by hand in our shop. That's how we started in business, as jewelry craftsmen. And, then, of course, we started selling merchandise also in addition to making mountings by hand.

**JE:** (In agreement) Mhmm.

**FR:** And we sold the manufactured mountings also from other manufacturers. So, my dad, with his experience, and with my experience with him and working with gemologists and jewelers over the years, we were the most knowledgeable jewelers in this part of the country.

**JE:** I'm going to say you were the jewelry store.

**FR:** We were the jeweler, uh-huh.

**JE:** Right.

## **Chapter 10 – 2:35**

### **Celebration of V-J Day – Tulsa**

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**Frank Riesinger (FR):** My V-J Day, you know, I created the first and only celebration of V-J Day in the city, the state, the nation, the world. I created it back 7 years ago and we've had these V-J Day celebrations each year since then.

**John Erling (JE):** Yeah. Are you surprised that it hadn't been done sooner?

**FR:** No one thought of it.

**JE:** Nobody thought about it.

**FR:** For the 70th anniversary of V-J Day, I looked around and, surely, there's going to be a nation-wide celebration. But there wasn't. So I created one. And we had the first celebration of V-J Day here in 2015 for the 70th anniversary of V-J Day and I've continued them every year since then.

**JE:** Did Clarence Oliver help you with that?

**FR:** Yes. As a matter of fact, Clarence and I — told you a while ago — when I couldn't do it alone when I was living in Broken Arrow at the time. I asked him to help me and he helped me originate the first V-J Celebration and has been with me for the creation of each of them since then.

**JE:** Of course, Clarence is superintendent of schools in Broken Arrow Public Schools.

**FR:** He was for many years.

**JE:** I interviewed him, as well, and am honored to interview you. When your father died and both of you had been working in that jewelry store for so long, that had to have been tough for you.

**FR:** Yes, it was tough. Uh-huh.

**JE:** And so many people in town knew your father.

**FR:** Oh, he was great. Yes. He was well-known. And, of course, I followed in his step.

**JE:** But, see, you have that — maybe the personality of your father, don't you think? You're outgoing and you have a salesman's personality; you have a nice smile.

**FR:** Yes, well, he was the finest jeweler and engraver to ever live in this part of the country. I could inherit it. I worked at jewelry engraving and I did reasonably well, but I was not as fine an engraver as he was. And, so, I followed in work with him — tried to be as good as him, but I couldn't be as good as him — as a craftsman. So, he saw that, so, that's when he said "Let's open a store. Ya know, let's run a fine store." So that's where he saw the opportunity in me to open our fine store in Utica Square.

## **Chapter 11 – 3:23**

### **Teen Bride**

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**John Erling (JE):** As you think about your life, your reasoning — you get to live to be 96-years-old. We'll put it that way. Nigh-on to 96-years-old. But your way of thinking and so forth, and reasoning has changed over the years, hasn't it?

**Frank Riesinger (FR):** Not really.

**JE:** No?

**FR:** No.

**JE:** The way you approach life and think about things?

**FR:** Nothing's changed. I'm just the kid that my kids raised.

**JE:** What was the, say, best 10 years — best decade — for you? '70s, '80s, '90s?

**FR:** They were all good. John, they were all good. It was a wonderful life my parents prepared for me and I've had a wonderful life. There was no downtime. I had 63 heavenly years with my wife. We courted for the first 3

years because she was only 15. I had to wait until she was 18 to marry her, but we had 63 heavenly years together.

**JE:** And how old was she when she died?

**FR:** Let's see. She was only 74.

**JE:** And you were close in age.

**FR:** Well, no, I'm 9 years older. See, I married her — she turned 18, I married her. I was 27 (Chuckling).

**JE:** Alright. Did all the parents approve of all that?

**FR:** They didn't know. (Laughing)

**JE:** Because, what? Where did you go to get married?

**FR:** Well, at the time we were going together — from the time she was 15 to the time she turned 18 and I could marry her — her folks didn't know how old I was. They assumed I was a couple-three years older. But I was almost 9 years older than her. It was so funny, John. When the announcement came out in the paper, "Frank Riesinger, 27, Bobbie Young, 18," that's the first that her parents knew the difference in age. And Bobbie stood over her mother while she read the article in the paper and her mother didn't say a word (Laughing).

**JE:** She was afraid she was —

**FR:** (Laughing) Didn't say a word! But, by that time, all the announcements were out and everything, so.

**JE:** But, they approved of you, so that's the point.

**FR:** Well, we went to the same church. I was an elder in the church, so I guess that meant something, I don't know (Laughing).

**JE:** Yeah. How about children from your marriage?

**FR:** Had two wonderful children — Ron and Anne.

**JE:** Ron and Anne?

**FR:** Ron and Anne, yeah. And I have 7 grandchildren and 9 great-grandchildren.

**JE:** Wow. How proud you are of that family.

**FR:** Through two kids, yeah. Kids had a wonderful time growing up here in Tulsa.

**JE:** And they had all the jewelry they could want, right?

**FR:** (Laughing) They didn't have any jewelry. Bobbie and I didn't — I gave Bobbie a lot of jewelry, but the kids didn't have jewelry, no. I made a ring for each of 'em.

**JE:** They didn't care that much about it.

**FR:** They didn't care, no.

**JE:** But they both have jewelry now that they ...

**FR:** Oh, yeah, uh-huh.

**JE:** ... favor and savor.

**FR:** They've inherited their mom's jewelry.

**JE:** Right.

## **Chapter 12 – 10:17**

### **A Must Listen**

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**John Erling (JE):** So, young people listening to our talk. What advice would you pass on to them?

**Frank Riesinger (FR):** Love God, love your country.

**JE:** Yeah. And your faith has been important to you.

**FR:** Yes, it has.

**JE:** From the beginning? Your parents raised you in church?

**FR:** Yes. Right.

**JE:** And, so, that denomination was what church?

**FR:** Presbyterian.

**JE:** Presbyterian. Yeah. And your faith is strong to this day, isn't it?

**FR:** To this day.

**JE:** Yeah.

**FR:** I thank God everyday for every moment of my 96 — almost 96 — years. I've had a wonderful life. I could have gotten killed in World War II. Not really close because I hadn't finished training and only served in the last year of the war. But I had lots of wonderful memories. Lots of wonderful memories. I've seen every state in the nation. I've been to every state in the nation, Hawaii included, and I've seen a lot of the country; I've traveled the country. I've been overseas ... let's see now. 5 times. I've been to Hawaii 7 times. I've been to Europe 4 times. In the last several years, I've been at the celebrations of the end of the war in Europe — wonderful celebrations. I went to V-E Day celebrations twice over there and wonderful memories of World War I. I just served the last year of the war, all in this country, and I was anxious to go overseas, but, as the war was winding down, I never did get to serve overseas.

**JE:** I think I'm going to know the answer to this. If you could go back to any age, what age would it be?

**FR:** My grown-up years. Wonderful years.

**JE:** Yeah.

**FR:** Had fun growing up.

**JE:** You know, I just admire you. It's hard for me to believe that you're really 95-years-old.

**FR:** Me too!

**JE:** (Laughing)

**FR:** I didn't dream I'd live this long. Nobody else's lived this long.

**JE:** I mean, I have to look at your driver's license to prove it, I think. (Chuckling)

**FR:** I'll show it to you if you want proof.

**JE:** No.

**FR:** I didn't dream I'd live this long, but, it's been a wonderful life.

**JE:** And your health over the years has been good?

**FR:** Been good, uh-huh.

**JE:** How about even today?

**FR:** Well, I have a story. When I was 4, I almost died. We were living in Tulsa. I had stomach problems. And they took me to the hospital and I had stomach trouble. I had ingestion in the — congestion in the stomach; so I'll show ya. When I was 4, they operated on me. (Frank rustles the microphone as he adjusts his clothing).

**JE:** So, he's showing me the scar from 4 years — oh!

**FR:** From 4 years old, see it?

**JE:** And, so, what did they go in there for? What was the surgery about?

**FR:** Stomach obstruction.

**JE:** Okay. And you can sit down so I can get the microphone.

**FR:** (Laughing) Stomach obstruction. They found no obstruction, took my appendix out, sent me home; that wasn't the problem. I started to develop something in my chest here. And, as a little 4-year-old, I started walking leaning over to the left because this pus was developing in my left pleural cavity. And they took me to the doctor; I had my operation in St. John's. They said "We can't do anything for you." My mother put me on the night train to Kansas City to Lakeside Hospital up there, and got me up there, and my dad traveled in his car behind. And he got up there just in time for my operation. In the operation, they found I had — can you see?

**JE:** (In agreement) Mmm. Mhmm.

**FR:** The scar?

**JE:** Yeah.

**FR:** I was 4-and-a-half.

**JE:** Wow.

**FR:** They cut me open; Dad watched the operation. He watched while they scraped out a cup full of pus out of the left pleural cavity. They sewed me up, and the doctor came in the room that night, they said: “Mr. Riesinger, I’m sorry, but I can’t save your boy.” My dad (Laughing) says he turned over to the doctor and said “Doctor, you better save my boy.”

**JE:** Yeah.

**FR:** I almost died that night. I survived the night and had several months there in the hospital and finally recovered enough — I was 4-and-a-half at the time — recovered enough to go to kindergarten in the fall when I turned 5.

**JE:** Wow.

**FR:** And that was the end of it for all of my life.

**JE:** And that was your biggest health problem your entire life, at 4 years old.

**FR:** Yup.

**JE:** Amazing.

**FR:** It was amazing. So, from that time on, I’ve been relatively healthy. I’ve had my tonsils out.

**JE:** (In agreement) Mhmm.

**FR:** And I’ve had a few problems. I have a lower branch block — left and right lower branch block. A cardiac physician could tell you what that is. I don’t know, but, someday, it’ll probably get me. Maybe while we’re sitting here it could happen. But, anyway, I might last another week or two, or month or two, maybe another year or two — who knows? I’m in reasonable, good health considering age and condition.

**JE:** How do you handle that thought — that you could die at any time? Do you think about it?

**FR:** Doesn’t bother me. I’m anxious to go because I lost my wife when — ya know, I lost my wife 9 years ago. I’ve been wanting to join her ever since.

**JE:** Yeah.

**FR:** So I’ve been wanting to. At that time, I decided: “I want to go. I don’t want to live alone.” But I’ve made up my mind: As long as I’m in good health, to make the best of it. And I’ve done quite a lot. I’ve had 7 V-J Day celebrations. I’ve organized the only one in the world. No one else in the world has ever celebrated V-J Day because, right here in Broken Arrow. And, Lord willing, in a couple months, we’ll have the 77th anniversary of V-J Day here at the performing arts center. The last year, we’ve had the

performing arts center, we've celebrated there, and we'd have nation-wide coverage. You remember General Milley, the Chairman of our Joint Chiefs of Staff? He couldn't come. I visited with him in Belgium 2 years ago at the 75th anniversary of The Battle of the Bulge. He and I sat at the same table there and, along with Mark Esper, who was Secretary of Defense at the time, and we talked; and two tables behind us, sat the king and queen of Belgium, King Phillippe and Queen Wilhelmina. And I said to General Milley — he was sitting right across, as close as you are — I said, "Sir," — I was a corporal in World War II — "General Milley, do you suppose it would be alright if I go up and introduce myself to the king and queen?" He said, "Hell yes, corporal!" So I left General Milley and I walked over and approached the king and I saluted the king, he returned my salute. I introduced myself; we shook hands. "I'm Frank Riesinger," and he said, "I'm King Phillippe." And, anyway, after I visited with him a few minutes, the queen was sitting beside him. She was pretty — all decked out in a pretty red dress. I'll show you a picture in a minute, if you're interested — broad-brim red hat. I turned to the queen and I said, "Your majesty, where is your crown?" She smiled and said, "I left it at home. It was too heavy!" And she smiled and we shook hands and I went back and sat down with General Milley and behaved myself. And, then, I said to Mark Esper, the Secretary of Defense and General Milley and Mark Wood, who was ambassador to Belgium set in there, I said, "If you guys will get the president aside, I'll ask the queen to come over here and sit on my lap." And they just roared laughing. This was in Bastogne, Belgium two years ago.

**JE:** The king and queen of Belgium is who you're talking about.

**FR:** This was in Bastogne, Belgium for the 75th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge.

**JE:** That's funny. That's funny.

**FR:** Isn't that funny?

**JE:** Lookit: you still have a lot of living to do, don't you?

**FR:** Probably.

**JE:** You could live to be a hundred.

**FR:** No. I want to join Bobbie, I'm sorry.

**JE:** I understand.

**FR:** I miss her. I'd rather be there, but while I'm here, I'm going to make the best of it, John.

**JE:** You did. I'm so impressed and I thank you for this time you gave so that other generations could listen to what a great man you are ...

**FR:** I'm not a great man.

**JE:** ... and also the fact that you can be as long as you are and still be productive and still do things in this country. That is — I admire you for that. So, thank you, Frank.

**FR:** You don't have to admire me. I'm just still around — for a few more months, maybe. We'll see (Laughing).

**JE:** Thank you, Frank.

**FR:** Alright. You're welcome!

**JE:** You are amazing.

**FR:** Not really. I'm just here (Laughing).

**JE:** Well...

**FR:** I'm just here, John. And I appreciate very much your doing this.

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