

George Matson

Meet “Golf Shop George”—an Irishman who has become a Tulsa Treasure.

Chapter 01 - 1:14

Introduction

Announcer: For fifty-five years George Matson answered the phone at Southern Hills Country Club as “Golf Shop George.”

George painted houses in Ireland until 1955, by which time he had saved \$400, enough for passage on the *SS America* to New York City and a train ticket to Tulsa, where an aunt had immigrated.

After placing a small ad in the *Tulsa World*, he received a call from Southern Hills Country Club and began work as a maintenance man. In 1955, he was asked to work in the golf pro shop where he spent fifty-five years with the nick name “Golf Shop George.”

Six national championships at the country club produced many fans, including Arnold Palmer, Gary Player and Jack Nicklaus.

While you can’t help but smile when Matson begins a story, there have been serious times, such as May 17, 1981. That’s when Matson heard the gun shots that killed businessman Roger M. Wheeler. Matson was the first on the scene.

George had a simple philosophy—greet people with a smile and a handshake. Matson’s philosophy paid off at Southern Hills. As good as he was for the club, it was good for him. The club commissioned an artist to make a bronze bust of George.

And now you can listen to George Matson in his great Irish brogue tell you the stories of “Clubhouse George” on VoicesofOklahoma.com.

Chapter 02 - 5:45

Early Days in Ireland

John Erling: My name is John Erling. Today’s date is January 28, 2015. George, would you give us your full name, please?

George Matson: George William Matson, M-A-T-S-O-N.

JE: And you came to be known with another name.

GM: A lot of names wherever I worked. I was known as Golf Shop George. Better known as Golf Shop George.

JE: Okay. When were you born?

GM: I was born 20th of August 1926.

JE: How old are you today?

GM: Almost eighty-nine.

JE: And where were you born?

GM: In a little town called Armagh, North Ireland.

JE: What kind of town was that?

GM: This town was the ecclesiastical capital of Ireland. The oldest city in Ireland, the town that I was born and raised in.

JE: You say "ecclesiastic"?

GM: Ecclesiastic.

JE: What?

GM: It was a church, we had two cathedrals, and there's only about ten thousand people. One was the Roman Catholic, and the other one was Episcopalian, and it was a real old Episcopal church.

JE: We hear about the fights between the Catholics and the Protestants—

GM: Yes.

JE: Did that tension appear in that village?

GM: Yes. But it was calmed down pretty good. There wasn't too much tension. It was in the south of my hometown Armagh, where the border was, crossing from the north to south end. It calmed down pretty good.

JE: So you then were a Protestant?

GM: Yes.

JE: Did you grow up in the church?

GM: I grew up in the Church of Ireland, which was the Episcopal church.

JE: What was your mother's name?

GM: Elizabeth, Elizabeth Matson. People used to call her Lizzie.

JE: What was her personality like?

GM: Oh she was all coming and going and she was wonderful, wonderful. And my father was the opposite. He was quiet and everything else, but she was always coming and going and hardworking. She worked in the church.

JE: Your father's name?

GM: Fred Matson. Everybody called him Freddy, but his proper name was Frederick.

JE: What did he do for a living?

GM: Well, he worked in the telephone exchange. He was supervisor in the telephone exchange. Well, the first when he got out of the Army and he was wounded and his knuckles were up here, up above his wrists—he got hit with a shell fragment and he couldn't use his right hand very much. But toward the end, he got a good job in the post offices and the telephone exchange and run that. He was good at it.

JE: You were growing up in this village, you went to elementary school there?

GM: Yes.

JE: What would you do with your friends, sports or—

GM: Oh we played soccer, mostly soccer, and we had two teams. And I played rugby. I got to where I was pretty darn good at it. It was a little bit rough but I'll never forget, I was playing rugby, I made it to the All-City team. They were all college graduates and I was the only one on. But everything I did, they were always helping me.

My old schoolmaster, which played rugby, stopped me one day in the street and hollered at me and I was wondering who was hollering at me. I was looking all over and he finally waved to me. I came across, he said, "George, would you do me a favor?"

I said, "Yes sir, I'd be glad to do you a favor."

He said, "Would you wear my uniform?"

I said, "Rugby uniform?"

He says, "Yes, would you wear by rugby uniform?" He was a little bit bigger than I was.

But I said, "Yes sir, I'd be proud to," because I couldn't afford a uniform.

JE: Oh, and you were playing with these others who had—

GM: Yes, college people.

JE: They had a uniform.

GM: Oh yes.

JE: And you didn't have one.

GM: I didn't have one, but he had retired and he give me his uniform. He said, "Would you do me a favor?"

JE: Yeah. And that had to boost your confidence?

GM: Oh it did, it really got me going. Really got me going.

JE: Yeah, that's a life story that I'm sure you remembered forever.

GM: For a long time.

JE: So when there was a time you could help somebody else, I know you did it. And what a nice way for him to say, "I know you can't afford it so use this."

GM: This is correct.

JE: "Would you give me the honor of wearing my uniform?"

GM: And he was always at the games, and he'd stand on the line there and he'd tell me what to look out for and who to look out for and to get this character.

JE: So he became your coach in a way too then, didn't he?

GM: That is correct.

JE: That's fun to hear. Elementary, middle school, your education over there?

GM: I just went to the one school, elementary school.

JE: How many grades was that?

GM: Up to eighth grade.

JE: Eighth grade?

GM: Yes.

JE: And then you did not go on to high school?

GM: No. Well, there were no high schools, it were all college, and I could not afford them and Mother could not afford. There was four boys and one girl, and we could not go to college, so everybody got a job.

JE: So then, tell me, your family, siblings, how many did you have?

GM: Four boys and one girl.

JE: Are they living today?

GM: No.

JE: Are you the youngest?

GM: No I was the second youngest, but everybody else is gone.

JE: Yeah. So they didn't really have what we call high school?

GM: No, they had a technical school and then had the college.

JE: What did you do then after the eighth grade?

GM: I got a job. I was a painter and worked for a painting company and painted outside the houses and windows and everything else. And inside, we kept buy the year round.

JE: So you're about thirteen, fourteen years old?

GM: That's correct.

JE: When you really start working full time.

GM: That's correct.

JE: Why a painter?

GM: They were looking for painters. Later on I wanted to be a plumber, but I stuck to what I was doing. And then when things got slack, I worked in the shipyard at Belfast, as a painter.

JE: So then you painted your way out of Ireland, didn't you?

GM: Yes.

Chapter 03 – 6:15**No Surrender**

John Erling: Was it about when you were fifteen you were a member of the National Guard?

George Matson: Yes, that is correct.

JE: Why did you sign up? Did you have to? Was there a draft?

GM: No there was no draft for I was too young. And I finally got my father, I was given him, “I need to do something. My two brothers are in the Royal Navy,” and I wanted to be of service to the country. So he willingly signed my papers and got me into National Guard.

JE: We should point out, this was, of course, during World War II.

GM: That is correct.

JE: And Ireland was fighting in that war as well.

GM: The North of Ireland, yes.

JE: Your brothers were in it and you wanted to participate somehow.

GM: I wanted to participate and I did. We used to go out on maneuvers and everything else. And we used to love whenever we went out on maneuvers we’d be invited into the American camps. Oh we could eat like a horse in the American camps. But we didn’t get near the food that they were getting.

JE: When you were around the American soldiers, did they talk to you about the United States?

GM: Oh heck yes. That’s what got me wanting to go to America. After the war was over, all the GI’s come back and all the soldiers, people that were in the North of Ireland, all came back again. And they were all wanting to get a job, and there were very few jobs available then. So they were either going to Australia or Africa or anyplace they could get a job. And they were all immigrating.

JE: But the American soldiers, they talked to you about the United States. What would they tell you?

GM: Oh how big and how great it was. And the reason I came to Tulsa, Oklahoma was the oil capital of the world.

JE: And that’s what they told you?

GM: Oh heck yes.

JE: Right.

GM: Everybody was told that Oklahoma was the oil capital of the world.

JE: What else did they say about the United States and—

GM: How big it was.

JE: So the soldiers peaked your interest then about the United States?

GM: Definitely.

JE: You were about fifteen years old. Did you think then, “Boy, one day I’d like to go there”?

GM: That is the reason I’m here today.

JE: Okay, so they kind of planted the seed for you, didn’t they?

GM: They planted the seed. They told me everything.

JE: Did any of your friends, that you knew, had they gone to the United States?

GM: No, most of them were going to Australia or New Zealand or Africa, all these countries were inviting the Irish that were coming back from the war to go to Australia and New Zealand.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

GM: Everybody was going somewhere.

JE: I think the Northern Campaign was a series of attacks involving volunteers of the Irish Republican Army—

GM: Yes.

JE: ...during the Second World War, between September 1942 and December 1944. Was that part of your memory? Did you know much about that?

GM: That’s part of the reason I was in the National Guards.

JE: You were in that Northern Campaign?

GM: Yes. We always went out at least one night a week. But you never went out single, two people always went together.

JE: What were you fighting against at that time? It was a plan by the then IRA, Northern Command, to launch attacks—

GM: That’s correct.

JE: ...within Northern Ireland during this period.

GM: They wanted to take over the north of Ireland.

JE: Who did?

GM: The IRA, Irish Republican Army. We said, “No, we’re going to stay with England.”

JE: You were actually fighting for the Northern Irish and England—

GM: England.

JE: ...against the IRA.

GM: Yes. It’s surprising, during the war we were besieged by Irish people coming from the South of Ireland, wanting to get into British Army. And we’d check them in and give them an okay to go down. And they all wanted to go into British Army and fight.

JE: I’m probably lost here on this because during World War II, did Ireland actually fight in that war? Or—

GM: The North of Ireland did.

JE: But those in the Northern Ireland, they fought in World War II.

GM: We were at war, we were at war.

JE: And then you had your own war going within your own country.

GM: That is correct.

JE: So you had both going. Your brothers then were in the fight of World War II and then—

GM: They were in the Royal Navy.

JE: And then *you* were in the Northern Campaign—

GM: That is correct.

JE: ...against the IRA.

GM: That is correct, but the North of Ireland had no draft during the war. They were getting so many recruits they couldn't keep up with them. And there was no draft in the North of Ireland.

JE: So the IRA is actually attacking—

GM: Irish Republican Army, they were anything to beat England.

JE: And they were attacking Northern Ireland.

GM: That is correct.

JE: All right, did you see any actual battle?

GM: Oh heck yes.

JE: Can you tell us what that was like?

GM: Well, the battles that we had, they were hiding and the mountains are deep grass and they'd be firing at us. And we always had a 303 Lee and Field rifle and we always had a hundred rounds of ammunition. We'd go out on patrol we'd always put ten rounds in the magazine.

JE: Did you have casualties?

GM: No.

JE: Those around you?

GM: We had very few casualties.

JE: Then the outcome of that war?

GM: England was fighting Germany and so forth. When that ended, most of the trouble ended in Ireland too. It still goes on a little bit at the moment to this day.

JE: Right. That was the second Republican Campaign. The third took place from '56 to '62, and the fourth took place from '69 to '97. And then the fifth from '97 to this day, as you just said.

GM: That's correct.

JE: According to my notes.

GM: There's always somebody wants to take over, make Ireland all one. And we always said, "No surrender."

JE: Right.

GM: Until this very day we still say, "No surrender." We are not going to be a Catholic state. We're part of England and we're going to stay that way.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

GM: And it tis that way till this day.

JE: All right, so there's always that tension then, in the country.

GM: That is correct.

JE: With the IRA.

GM: But the biggest part of Ireland, even in South of Ireland, are wonderful people.

JE: Yeah.

GM: Wonderful people.

JE: It's just the extremists?

GM: Oh trouble made, it's just like troublemakers.

JE: Right.

Chapter 04 - 3:20

Coming to America

John Erling: You did that for a couple of years?

George Matson: Yes.

JE: Were you? And then you were back to working and painting. Then you would be about eighteen, nineteen years old. You're living your life there. You were twenty-six when you came here.

GM: Yes.

JE: So you finally decided one day—

GM: Come to America.

JE: ...I wanted to—and how did that come about? Even though you'd been wanting it to happen.

GM: Well, listening to the Americans.

JE: Right.

GM: They'd tell me how great America was. The money's on the state almost ready to pick up. We were gullible enough we believed it. Quite a few people came.

JE: Did you have a contact here in the United States?

GM: I had and they were up in Brooklyn.

JE: Was that a relative?

GM: No it was a good friend. I was going to stay with him.

JE: How much money did you have when you came over here?

GM: Five hundred dollars.

JE: Five hundred dollars. You saved from your hard work.

GM: Yes.

JE: And then?

GM: I went to Dover. In England, we got on the boat there. Then it went to France, and back to Ireland, again. I didn't know it went back there, but we went back to Ireland. And then I crossed to America.

JE: All right, how long were you on the boat?

GM: It was about nine or ten days.

JE: Did you come through Ellis Island?

GM: Yes.

JE: Do you have any experience there of Ellis Island?

GM: No.

JE: Or what they put you through? They checked your health, I suppose, to make sure—

GM: They checked out everything and what I had with me.

JE: I guess you had to have a contact.

GM: I had a contact and he was waiting for me. A fellow called Bill Blair.

JE: And he lived in Brooklyn?

GM: Yes.

JE: What was your first impression? I mean, you get off the boat on Ellis Island.

GM: You stand there with your mouth open, you think you're catching flies or something because you're just coming up on the Statue of Liberty and so forth. This is America. It's hard to describe. It brought the tears to our eyes. We're in America.

JE: And then you see that skyline of New York.

GM: Oh yes. When I got off the boat, this person, which I hadn't seen in quite a few years, his name Blair is from Urie. He met me at the boat and took care of me. But I got there to Brooklyn and I didn't like it. It's too big and everything else.

JE: Did you even think about staying in Brooklyn at all?

GM: I did.

JE: That was your first intention?

GM: That was my first intention. But it's just too big.

JE: How long did you stay with him in Brooklyn?

GM: About a week. I just did not like it. I'd sooner went back to Ireland than Brooklyn. I did not like the crowds, and getting on the buses to go here and go there.

JE: So you might have gone back to Ireland but you knew you had a relative here in Tulsa.

GM: Yes, it was my mother's sister's husband. They were old because my mother was old.

JE: So then you told your friend there in Brooklyn, "I have a relative in Tulsa"?

GM: Correct. In Tulsa.

JE: Did you call her then? Or—

GM: I called them but I didn't know they were that old.

JE: How old did you think they were?

GM: Eighty.

JE: Oh really? So you called them?

GM: Yes.

JE: And said, "I'd like to come to Tulsa."

GM: Yes. And I got there and it was kind of summertime. And I slept on the screened-in porch. It was good for me, it was better than where I was in Ireland.

JE: Yeah.

Chapter 05 - 5:05

Southern Hills

John Erling: So then, you knew you had to work.

George Matson: That's correct. And I went to this little Baptist church. It was at 51st and Lewis. There used to be a store and then the Baptist church. They put a scrib in the paper about—

JE: That here's this young man who came from Ire—

GM: Irishman who came over and was looking for work. Cheddy Martin, which was the general manager of Southern Hills Country Club, seen the little ad and he called me and wanted to know if I'd come and talk to him.

And I did, and that lasted for fifty-five years.

JE: Right.

GM: Oh sure, we had a wonderful time.

JE: So then you started there, obviously then, as a painter.

GM: That's correct.

JE: At Southern Hills. Right, but that didn't last forever. You painted for how many months?

GM: Oh I'd say five or six months.

JE: Then what happened?

GM: There was a man in the Pro Shop called Bill Walsburn. He asked me if I'd like to come and work for him in the Pro Shop.

I said, "Yes, I'd love to."

He says, "Put on your good clothes tomorrow and come and we'll talk." He took me into the Pro Shop and showed me all around. The person he had working in the Pro Shop, Holloway, he wanted to retire, so they hired me.

JE: Any idea why?

GM: Bill was from Monifieth, Scotland.

JE: Okay.

GM: We worked closely—

JE: He had an infinity for you then.

GM: Yes. Here's an Irishman coming over and almost blood brothers. He liked me and I liked him, and we got along wonderful together.

JE: So you'd been talking before he asked you this question?

GM: Yes.

JE: And knew that. Had you ever played golf in your life?

GM: No.

JE: So—

GM: I'd never had a golf club in my hand.

JE: So you didn't know anything about golf?

GM: No I did not know the first thing.

JE: All right. So when he brings you into the clubhouse, what are you doing right away?

GM: Well, in the clubhouse people come in and point out the shirts and get to know the mediums and large and next to larges and know how to fold them, this kind of stuff. And a little bit of dusting and cleaning.

JE: Eventually, you became the general manager of the golf shop.

GM: Yes.

JE: How long did you work there before you got that job?

GM: A couple of years, two or three years.

JE: Okay, all right. So were you enjoying the golf shop?

GM: I loved it. I loved it. Well, golf balls, I did not know what golf balls were. The only time we ever got a golf ball we'd cut it open and get the elastic thing out. And at school we'd fire paper balls of it. That's the only time we used it.

JE: I did that too, and then you get down to the heart of the golf ball and you've got that—

GM: Yes, there's a wee ball in there.

JE: Right, and then you open that up and there was a white substance in that.

GM: That was a poison, they always said that's poison.

JE: Right.

GM: But I didn't know what it was.

JE: Right. I did the same. All right, wasn't there somebody who came to the clubhouse for the mail every day?

GM: Yes. This lady, her father run the riding stables where the polo ponies and all were. Her father was manager of that. She used to come up and get the mail every day. After she left, a couple of times, I'd go in and I'd say, "Lady," that was the secretary, who she was. She was coming out and getting the mail for her father down at the riding stables where she lived. So I used to wait and I'd be out sweeping so I'd get to talk to her.

JE: And her name?

GM: Daphne Bass, D-A-P-H-N-E Bass. She was always businesslike, and I was always trying to talk to her so I can maybe have a date. And I can remember so well, oh, I finally talked her into having a date, and then I had to run after her car and ask her could she drive, because I did not have a car.

And she says, "Well, this is my father's car." She lived with her father and mother.

We used to go down to Brookside at Scaggs, think there was a Scaggs Store there at 36th and Peoria. We used to go there and get a limeade. And that was a big treat.

JE: So she drove?

GM: She was doing the driving, yes.

JE: When did you start driving and get your driver's license?

GM: Two or three years later because I can remember, I bought my first car and it was an old one. And just enjoying it when Uncle Sam sent me a letter telling me my friends and neighbors wanted me in the American Army. Oh I was here about two or three years, and I got my citizenship.

JE: That had to make you feel good.

GM: Ooooh, I was proud as a peacock. I was proud to get my American citizenship. Got my citizenship, and then soon as I got my citizenship, Uncle Sam said, "Your friends and neighbors want you in the Army."

JE: Right.

GM: So I went into the Army.

Chapter 06 - 4:50

U.S. Military

George Matson: There was 250 of us.

John Erling: We should say, this is during the Korean War.

GM: This was during the Korean War.

JE: This would have been in the '50s, of course. In the company you were in there were 250.

GM: Two hundred and fifty. The colonel got up there and he's telling us, "Two hundred and forty are going to Korea." And he says, "There's ten going to Europe." Believe it or not, I was one of the ten picked to go to Europe.

JE: Were you really happy?

GM: Ooooh, I was happy. I let a roar out of me. I had to turn around and salute the commanding officer again, and said, "Sorry, sir, that was just—I was going home."

So they sent me. And I got to my destination, Bremerhaven, Germany.

JE: And what did you do there?

GM: I was in the supply business. We had a big supply depot. That's what they trained me for. All American stuff came to us first. Whoever wanted it, we would send it to them. When I was in the Army I was stationed in Germany, and I put in for a furlough and I couldn't get one. This was in November.

I went to the company commander and he said, "Well, I have nothing to do about it."

I said, "Yes sir, but you never regret this. If I get to go home for Christmas."

He said, "I have nothing to do with it."

I said, "Sir, I can always go AWOL, absent without leave."

He said, "You're not going to be dumb enough to do that."

I said, "Sir, I want to go and see my mother and father. I'm not just going to go looking for girls."

So he says, "Well, let me try." The twenty-third day at December, there were a notice, "Private Matson, see the company commander."

I went in and saluted him and he says, "You know what you said?"

I said, "Yes sir."

He says, "You have fourteen—"

I said, "Fourteen? I only wanted a couple."

He said, "You have fourteen days, and do not let me down."

And I was not about to let him down. I went home, I rung the doorbell, and walked in on my mother and father, and she passed out on me. She wasn't expecting me. I walked up and here's somebody in an American uniform. It was her son. And do you know? Every time I went home on furlough, I never got into civilian clothes. They were always proud of their son in American uniform.

JE: Yeah, how proud they were.

GM: They were proud. "Put on your uniform, come on, we're going downtown. Put on your uniform."

JE: That's a wonderful memory. What about Daphne then?

GM: Well, I told her, "Now if I'm going to Korea, I'm not even going to get engaged."

JE: You were afraid if you went to Korea, you didn't know if you'd be coming back again.

GM: That's the reason I did not want to get engaged or anything else.

JE: You did not want her to go through that. So then, you were very happy to say, "I'm not going to Korea."

GM: I'll never forget, I called her on a Friday night, and said, "Honey, do you want to get married?"

She said, "What?"

I said, "Do you want to get married? I'll be home on Sunday. I've got five days, and if you want to get married, arrange the wedding."

JE: Did she say yes right away?

GM: Oh no, she kind of stammered and stuttered for a few minutes as she was overcome.

I says, "I'm going to Europe. I've no idea where I'm going."

JE: Yeah.

GM: "But I'm going to Europe and let's get married." She arranged the wedding. I got home on a Sunday, I had five days. There was about twenty, thirty people there and that was it.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

GM: Because we didn't have time to invite people. Everything went well.

JE: Yeah. And how long were you married?

GM: Fifty-six years.

JE: And then you had children from that marriage?

GM: Yes, I had two boys.

JE: And their names?

GM: Jordie, or George, and Mark. Mark dropped dead of a heart attack on his way back from over on a vacation.

JE: How old was he?

GM: Forty-one.

JE: And then we should say that George, Jordie, is here in the room with us today.

GM: Yes. That is correct, Jordie's right here. He's actually George, but we call him Jordie to distinguish between he and I.

JE: What church were you married in?

GM: First Presbyterian Church.

JE: First Presbyterian Church?

GM: Yes. Dr. Miller married us. That was the old Dr. Miller.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

GM: Not the one that we have today.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

GM: You know how you got a little envelope and putting a few dollars in it for him. He refused to take it. I said, "Sir?"

He says, "No I'm not going to take a GI's money." He was a great man.

JE: Yeah.

GM: He was Adwin Miller, Dr. Adwin Miller.

JE: There's a library there at First Presbyterian Church named after that Dr. Miller.

GM: That is correct, Dr., that is correct.

JE: Yeah, what a kind man.

Chapter 07 - 5:25**Tournament Time**

John Erling: Then you come out of the Army and you come back here to Tulsa.

George Matson: That is correct.

JE: And you're married by that time. You go back to Southern Hills because they had a job waiting for you there.

GM: That is correct.

JE: You were back in to the clubhouse then. That was in the '50s. So I believe your first major tournament was the US Open.

GM: Open.

JE: In 1958.

GM: Yes. Tommy Bolt.

JE: Exactly. He won that tournament. What kind of a guy was Tommy Bolt?

GM: He threw more clubs than any other person, but Tommy conducted himself wonderful in Tulsa. He never threw a club and he won the tournament.

JE: He was also known as Terrible Tommy?

GM: Terrible Tommy.

JE: Thunder too, I think.

GM: Yes. He used to throw the clubs if he had a bad shot, but he kept the ball in control and everything else.

JE: He was born in Heyworth, Oklahoma. Did you visit with him?

GM: Oh yes, I used to speak to him.

JE: He was a likeable person?

GM: Very likeable. He used to always kid me about, "Why don't you learn to speak English?"

JE: Gary Player was in that tournament as well.

GM: Yes, that is correct. And Gary was a very nice gentleman. He used to always come in and speak to me.

JE: At that time, Gary Player was twenty-two years old.

GM: He was young.

JE: He made his debut, that was his first US Open.

GM: That is correct, he was very young.

JE: And these players then, would always come into the clubhouse.

GM: Yes.

JE: So you would see them come in?

GM: They would always come in and speak to me because they get their golf balls from me. And I'd give them the allotment, three dozen balls, they'd pay me and I would give them receipt and they would go right outside the door. But the public were watching us.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

GM: On Edward's great salesmanship.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

GM: They would come in and watch him, "He's getting Titleist golf balls." Everybody was wanting to know what kind of balls they were and this, that, and the other. It was wonderful.

JE: Ben Hogan played in that tournament.

GM: Ben Hogan, yes.

JE: This was his fifth US Open title—

GM: Yes.

JE: ...that he was after. I believe his left wrist had been injured in that tournament.

GM: Correct.

JE: And he finished eleven strokes back in a tie for tenth. Then there was a very young man, he was eighteen years old. And that person was Jack Nicklaus. Here's this young, eighteen-year-old Jack Nicklaus, this is his second US Open. He made his first cut and he finished forty-first place.

GM: Yes.

JE: What was he like?

GM: He was young and nervous. I don't care what he shot, he would always come in and speak to you and, "Did you have a good round?"

"Well, I didn't have a good round but it was fun. The course is in wonderful shape," this, that, and the other. And it was always fun.

JE: Huh (surprised sound). How many years did they always come in to the club shop itself? Because wasn't there a point where they just went to their lockers and they never came into your shop?

GM: Well, they had to come through the shop to go to the locker room.

JE: Okay. They'd all come through the shop.

GM: But then they wouldn't allow—then they stopped and wouldn't allow the general public to come into the Pro Shop.

JE: Okay, okay, they could mingle, at first.

GM: Yes.

JE: We have Sam Snead, who played in that tournament.

GM: Sam Snead, yes.

JE: He too was a nice, pleasant person?

GM: He was always pleasant to me, but sometimes who he was paired with, he did not like them. They did not—

JE: Oh really? How did you know that he didn't like them?

GM: Well, I would talk to him personally and find out what was going on and how they were doing.

JE: And then he'd say, "Oh, I don't want to be with—"

GM: "Oh don't pair me with..." As you know, we have nothing to do with the pairings. That's the committee does that.

JE: Two-time champion Jean Sarazan missed the cut on his final appearance there?

GM: Yes.

JE: Jimmy Demerit.

GM: Demerit, he didn't do too bad.

JE: He played in this final Open and he withdrew after the third round.

GM: That's right, because he wasn't playing good.

JE: Would players grumble to you sometimes? Maybe the condition of the courts wasn't to their liking?

GM: Oh yes. They would always come in and let you know what they thought of the course.

JE: What were some of their biggest complaints in 1958?

GM: The rough.

JE: It was particularly tall?

GM: Yes it was tall. It was three or four, maybe some places five inches tall. And they couldn't find the ball. It took a lot of time to find the ball. I'm sure they had a caddy and everything else, but when it goes down in the grass, they'd have to walk on it before—

JE: Right, they'd have to step on it, right.

GM: Yes.

JE: I would imagine a lot of these players, "Tulsa, Oklahoma? What's that?" And this was in 1958. But had to be impressed then when they come to Tulsa and come out on this golf course?

GM: And come out on this golf course. And it was too tough for some of them.

JE: It was too tough?

GM: Yes, for some of them.

JE: Was it considered long for them?

GM: Yes. The grass was tall and the course was long. Well, this was our first big tournament.

JE: Yeah.

GM: And the people that were running it, I think Phil Taber was the general manager of the tournament then. They set the course and it was tough.

JE: Some of them were not used to the grass?

GM: Yes, were not used to Bermuda grass.

JE: Well, it was the first of seven major championships at Southern Hills. US Open returned and we'll talk about them, '77, 2001, PGA had been played on the course four times, '70, '82, '94, 2007. Let's just go on to some other tournaments here. Then that was '58, so it wasn't until 1970, then, when you had a PGA championship.

GM: Yes.

Chapter 08 - 3:20

Arnold Palmer

John Erling: But did you have some amateur championships in there?

George Matson: Oh yes. The amateurs were then mostly in Oklahoma City and Oklahoma City kind of got mad at us because we were stealing theirs.

JE: What was a golf club over there in Oklahoma City?

GM: Twin Hills.

JE: So there was competition between the two of you.

GM: Oh heck yes.

JE: To get these amateur tournaments.

GM: To get any tournament. We were the best and Oklahoma City did not like to be second.

JE: No, and that continued on because you had all the major tournaments here.

GM: Yes.

JE: I don't know off the top of my head what major tournament was played over there, maybe there were some. But you've had the major ones.

GM: We got the major ones here.

JE: In 1970, PGA championship Dave Stockton won the first of his to—

GM: Dave Stockton, yes.

JE: Dave too, I suppose, they're all nice guys, are they?

GM: Oh, Dave Stockton was a very nice guy. He and his wife, they always come in and speak and talk to you.

JE: He was two strokes ahead of runners-up Bob Murphy and Arnold Palmer. This was Palmer's third runner-up finish and the only major that he never won. So tell me about Arnold Palmer, when he'd come in and visit with you.

GM: Arnold was a wonderful gentleman. He used to come in early in the morning. He'd have his newspaper under his arm and he'd come in and he'd stand at the counter. If I was busy, he would open up the newspaper and start reading, and then as soon as I got rid of what I was doing, he would always roll up his newspaper and stick it under his arm, and we

would talk. He was so nice, and he'd come back out to get, "George, you mind if I use your workshop in there?"

"No not at all, go ahead."

And he'd be hammering away in there. "George, can I use the telephone?"

"Yes sir, go ahead, here's the telephone right there."

And then he'd call his office, "Send me another club, this damn thing is no good." He'd potted it to death and then he always wanted another one.

I'll never forget one time, he and Jack Nicklaus were playing. It was in a tournament but they were paired together. Somebody said, "Palmer and Nicklaus are on fifteen."

And I said, "Well, let's walk over here to sixteen."

They come up and Jack and Arnie are waiting for the players ahead of them to clear out of the way. I'll never forget it, and Arnie was smoking by me and he's smoking his cigarette. He walked by and he took about three or four steps and turned around and said, "Golf Shop George, what the Devil are you doing?" And he pointed his finger at me.

And everybody was taking pictures. He never forgot it. He always remembered your name.

JE: Yeah, even though he was in the heat of battle he was—

GM: Oh heck yes.

JE: Would you say that of all these names, and we'll name others, that Arnold Palmer stands out?

GM: And A is number one, and oh yes, Jerry Pittman.

JE: What would be one of the highlights then of that '70 PGA?

GM: Well, that Dave Stockton, he was playing good, and Palmer put one in the water on, I think it was twelve. He took off his shoe and waded in and hit the ball out of it.

JE: Out of the water?

GM: Water, yes. He wasn't going to sacrifice it. It was buried very deep in water and he did a good job.

JE: He rolled up his pants, I guess—

GM: Oh heck yes.

JE: ...and there's lots of famous pictures of that I think—

GM: Yes.

JE: ...of him walking in that.

Chapter 09 - 6:36

More Names You Know

John Erling: The defending champ was Raymond Floyd.

George Matson: Ray Floyd. Ray and Jimmy Choo, Jimmy Choo caddied for him then.

JE: Oh he was a caddy?

GM: Yes.

JE: They say it was particularly hot, 101-degree heat.

GM: It was hot.

JE: Raymond Floyd carded a sixty-five on Saturday and he was in second place at 209. And then Palmer was alone in third place at 211. But Dave Stockton won.

GM: Stockton and his wife are very nice, polite people.

JE: Then we can jump to the 1977 US Open. Hubert Green.

GM: Hubie Green.

JE: He won the first of his two major titles. Some remembrances of that of the seventy-seven and Hubert Green.

GM: He was very nice to talk to and very polite. You know some of these other players come in and if you ask them how they're doing they will chew your head off, but he was very nice.

JE: Something major happened in that tournament. He had four holes to play, he needed to play even par.

GM: Yes.

JE: And he came off the fourteenth green. Tell us what happened there.

GM: We got word that he was going to be taken care of.

JE: Meaning it was a threat on his life.

GM: It was a threat on his life.

JE: And they were going to assassinate him.

GM: We do not know why. Our security got the call, I think it was fourteen.

JE: Yes, he came off the fourteenth and they told him that.

GM: Yes, there was a lot of police around him then. I guess it would bother you, knowing that somebody was going to try and take a potshot at you.

JE: Absolutely. So he goes on to the fifteenth and he hit his drive into a tree, which they say probably saved from going out of bounds, as a matter of fact. But he approach to thirty-five feet and he two putt for par without incident and knowing there was a threat on his life. That's concentration, isn't it?

GM: Well, we had so many security around we had the field pretty well. And they were not watching the play, they were watching anybody in the gallery.

JE: Were you in the clubhouse?

GM: At the time, I was in the clubhouse, but then I went out to try and help control the crowd.

JE: Then he birdied the sixteenth and he took a two-stroke lead into the eighteenth and he struggled on that hole.

GM: Yes.

- JE:** But he managed to make a four-putter for bogey and then he won. That was a real memorable time for him and to play under that kind of duress.
- GM:** Yes. And we never did find out who called in the threat.
- JE:** Sam Snead that year marked the final—
- GM:** Slammin' Sammy.
- JE:** The final US Open.
- GM:** Yes.
- JE:** By Sam Snead. Julius Burrows, that was a good name.
- GM:** Julius Burrows was a wonderful person. Sammy, you never knew how to take him, if he'd be mad or not.
- JE:** But Julius Burrows and Tommy Bolt were both good outgoing people.
- GM:** Tommy Bolt, he was nice at Southern Hills, he was very nice at Southern Hills, and he won the tournament.
- JE:** He has won a tournament but Hubert Green—
- GM:** Yes, not then.
- JE:** Right.
- GM:** He knew to control himself because some of our people that was in charge of the tournament was not slow in going up and telling him, "Conduct yourself or pack up your bag."
- JE:** Oh, they'd have to do that to Tommy sometimes?
- GM:** They could, yes. They just let him know who was boss, who was running it. Southern Hills was running the tournament, not him.
- JE:** So he behaved himself?
- GM:** Oh yes he did.
- JE:** He came in with a reputation then, didn't he?
- GM:** Yes.
- JE:** And this was the first time television broadcast the US Open, covered all eighteen holes of the final round.
- GM:** Yes.
- JE:** Then in 1982, they had the PGA Championship. This was when Raymond Floyd won his second PGA.
- GM:** Yes. He and I got along well together and he had a good friend Jimmy Choo, I think it was. Jim Choo was advising him on the golf course.
- JE:** Jimmy Choo was a member of the club?
- GM:** Yes, and a good player.
- JE:** So then, did he caddy and advise Raymond Floyd?
- GM:** He, he advised Raymond Floyd.

JE: Raymond Floyd was just shy of age forty. He shot an opening round of sixty-three, and he led wire to wire. He won his first PGA Championship thirteen years earlier in 1969. And it was another hot time.

GM: It was always hot.

JE: Always hot in August.

GM: Yes.

JE: Floyd had an opportunity to break the PGA 72-hole record of 271 set earlier by Bobby Nichols in '64, but he double-bogeyed the final round.

GM: The final round.

JE: The record lasted a dozen more years until broken by Nick Price in 1994.

GM: Nick Price was a good player.

JE: Yeah.

GM: And very nice.

JE: In 1982, the winner's share was sixty-five thousand dollars, the last in five figures of the PGA. It rose over 50 percent to a hundred thousand—

GM: Yes.

JE: ...the following year. And to 125 thousand in 1984.

GM: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

JE: Then there was the '94 PGA, August 11 of the fourteenth, and Nick Price led wire to wire and won his third.

GM: Yeah, Nick Price.

JE: And you liked him?

GM: I did, very much.

JE: Is there any player you didn't like?

GM: No, oh there's some you like better than others.

JE: Okay.

GM: But I would not say that so-and-so was no good.

JE: All right.

GM: Now I used to love to watch Ben Hogan. Ben would go down and he would get a special part on the practice tee. And he'd stand there most of the day hitting balls, hitting balls, hitting. And I went over to him one time, he would recognize me. He says, "Would you like to see me put this in this pocket?"

JE: Pocket? Whose pocket?

GM: The caddy's.

JE: 'Cause the caddy was standing down the way.

GM: Yes, the caddy was standing down there.

JE: Would you like to—in the pocket of the caddy?

GM: Yes. He could hit the ball that close. If he had his pocket open he could put it in it. Hogan was, he was fantastic, and he did not like to have a lot of people around him. But I'd go down and talk to him.

JE: Well, he liked you. Who didn't like Clubhouse George? Who didn't? They all liked you.

GM: I don't know.

JE: So Price became the first to win the Open Championship and PGA Championship in the same year. Last by Walter Haagen, and then in 1924, Greg Norman had just missed the previous year, losing in a playoff. It was later accomplished by Tiger Woods in 2000 and 2006.

GM: And Tiger's also ran now too.

JE: Here we go to 2001, the 101st US Open played and Rattiff Gootson won that tournament. Two strokes ahead of Mark Brooks, tournament was also notable for ending defending champion Tiger Woods's run of four consecutive major championships. The Tiger Slam, Woods finished seven strokes back in a tie for twelfth. He reclaimed the US Open title the following year, and then he won the PGA Championship at Southern Hills in 2007.

Chapter 10 - 2:55

Tiger Woods

George Matson: I can remember that, and I was down there when he was awarded the trophy.

John Erling: In 2007?

GM: Yeah. All the crews that worked there were invited down to make a big crowd on the green for him to be presented a trophy. And to me, I could have cared less about Tiger.

JE: Why?

GM: He was arrogant. He was arrogant. He thought he was king of the roost.

JE: And didn't you tell me that you asked him to sign some score cards for the staff?

GM: Yes, that is correct. I wanted him to sign, not for me but for some of the actual staff that come in and was working for him, and he did not have time. That made me so darn mad.

JE: Did he say that, "I don't have time"?

GM: Yes. He was busy.

JE: Here we are in 2015, and he's not on top as he was back then.

GM: Yes. Now he was a good player, you cannot take that from him, but his manner was a little different.

JE: What about Phil Nicholson?

GM: He was a nice person. Phil would always come in and speak to me, “How’s things going, George?” and this, that, and the other. And he’d treat you just like the rest of the players. He was a good person.

JE: Tiger never did that?

GM: No.

JE: Come in and visit with you?

GM: No, he never would. He wouldn’t talk to you.

JE: Well, in 2007, defending champ Tiger Woods won his fourth PGA Championship and thirteenth major title, two strokes ahead of runner-up Woody Austin. So that’s when he was on top of his game.

GM: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: Now he’s not. Anyway, I would say that for all the people that were there, and not to belabor the point, Tiger Woods was your least favorite, and Arnold Palmer was your favorite.

GM: That is correct.

JE: Wasn’t that the tournament in 2007, when Tiger Woods’s father had a heart attack?

GM: That is correct.

JE: And—

GM: And they were looking for Tiger and they couldn’t find him. He was down in Brookside with a couple of bimbos.

JE: How did we know that?

GM: They had a couple of police there, keeping the crowds back.

JE: Okay. And they took his father to St. Francis Hospital?

GM: Yes. And the next day, I was getting all the calls because I could take a cart and go out and give them the messages about his father and talk to his mother and tell her what was going on and so forth.

JE: Oh you got the report from the hospital?

GM: Yes.

JE: And you reported to his mother and to Tiger?

GM: That is correct.

JE: So did you speak directly to both of them or just to—

GM: Yes, I’d speak directly to his mother.

JE: Yeah, and then she would talk—

GM: And then she would talk to him.

JE: So during the course of that you did that several times?

GM: Yes, quite a few times. They’d always ask for me, and they knew that I could go out and get the message to him.

JE: He survived that and lived beyond that for a number of years, I believe.

GM: Oh heck yes.

JE: But he eventually did die, right?

GM: Yes. And his mother was very nice.

Chapter 11 - 2:55

Oral Roberts

John Erling: People from the Tulsa area that would have played, like Oral Roberts.

George Matson: Oral always come out and if there was nobody around he would just get a cart, have his clubs put on the cart, and go out and play. And if he caught up with somebody he would play with them.

JE: So he didn't care, he just—

GM: He did not care.

JE: Yeah.

GM: Or would have played with anybody.

JE: You said you didn't play golf yourself, but somewhere, this had to catch on with you in the golf club. How did you start playing golf?

GM: Well, my two sons, I had two sons then. I used to send them down in the summertime with the people conducting the lessons. That's the reason they like it Jordie there is good today. He played a lot of golf, and I was lucky. My two sons used to come out and I'd play with them.

JE: Did you decide one day, "Well, I need to start playing golf too"?

GM: Well, I was always too busy.

JE: Yeah.

GM: You know, you blamed it on everything else except yourself. I had all the time in the world, but I blamed it on I was too busy this, and too busy that. Then I finally decided to take it up and I went down and hit some balls. And three or four months ago, we went out and played a few holes and I'm going to start again.

JE: And here you are, eighty-eight years old.

GM: Yes. And I'm going to start again. It's good for me.

JE: Yeah. Of all the celebrities, did you play with any celebrities?

GM: No I never did play with any celebrities.

JE: Okay.

GM: They wanted me to play and I wouldn't because I wasn't good enough for them.

JE: But what's your best round?

GM: I think there was an 86 or an 87 was my best round.

JE: So you didn't feel like you were good enough to play with these people?

GM: That's correct.

JE: Your game or you? Bob Hope played here.

GM: Oh yes, Bob Hope. I could have played with him but I didn't think I was good enough to play with those people.

JE: You mean because of who you were as a person, or your game?

GM: No my game.

JE: They weren't good either.

GM: Well, some of these tournaments that we had, Jordie and Mark used to play in the programs.

JE: So then, Bob Hope, who else? Jerry Lewis I think would play here?

GM: He played with Oral.

JE: Or with Oral Roberts.

GM: Yes. Oh we had a lot of famous players but, you know, to me, my job was to run the place, not play golf.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

GM: People would get after me, "George, why don't you play more golf?"

I said, "I'm getting paid to run this place, not to spend all my time on the golf course. That's the head pro's job.

JE: But I'm sure you found enough time.

GM: Oh I guess.

JE: If you were shooting 84 or 85, you played a few rounds of golf.

GM: I played a few rounds, yes. Bob Ranquist, which is in Florida now, he was Green's Superintendent then. He and I used to go every Saturday and we'd get our clubs and I'd walk the nine-hole or walk on the west nine or threw them on a cart and we used to play a lot of golf together.

JE: Which hole was your favorite hole?

GM: I liked number four.

JE: Is that a par four?

GM: Par four down the road.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

Chapter 12 - 6:07**Roger Wheeler**

John Erling: There's a major date that has nothing to do with golf tournaments, May 27, 1981.

That's the day Roger Wheeler, an executive in our town, was murdered.

George Matson: Yes.

JE: Tell us what you know about that day. Did you see Roger before he went to his car?

GM: Yes. He played golf and he come in and changed clothes and so forth. I said, "Roger, how'd you play?"

He said, "You'd better change my handicap because these people are going to kill me."

I says, "Oh, Roger, we'll check behind the cap." And sure enough, here it is, he walked out to the car and there was a bang.

JE: You heard it?

GM: Yes.

JE: You heard a bang?

GM: Yes.

JE: What did you think?

GM: I didn't think anything really. Then went out and wanted to know what was going on. And the kids on the swimming board were pointing to the car. I went out and opened the car door and I didn't recognize who it was. And I went around to get the other door open and I couldn't get it open because it was locked. And I went back and fumbled around and got it opened and he was shot right through the eye. But I turned him around and I was going to give him resuscitation and there was no use, he was gone then.

JE: So you didn't give him resuscitation?

GM: I did a little bit.

JE: Did you touch the body?

GM: Yes, I touched the body, yes.

JE: All right.

GM: Then I run in and told them, "Call the police! And call an ambulance."

JE: You saw the blood then coming out—

GM: Yes, yes.

JE: ...and you realized, "No, I can't do anything about this"?

GM: Yes.

JE: So you went in to call the ambulance?

GM: I didn't call them, I told the help to call the ambulance and to call the police.

JE: Okay.

GM: And the police come up and I told them what was going on. And I kind of slipped out of the way for awhile. You're nervous and you're worked up. I was trying to calm myself down.

JE: Yeah, that was real traumatic to see that.

GM: Oh—

JE: Somebody who you had just spoken to.

GM: Spoken to him.

JE: A minute or two earlier.

GM: Or less. He walked out to his car, and bang.

JE: Roger and you, did you have any other personal activities together?

GM: I'd say, "Roger, are you playing Saturday?"

"Get me an early tee time, George."

And I'd say, "Well, I'll try." I said, "Are you going to the game?"

"Yeah, we're going to the game."

I said, "How about a seat on the plane?" Gale Clark was his pilot then.

JE: Gale Clark started Tulsa Air.

GM: Yeah.

JE: And now his son Tom has that.

GM: That is correct. But Gale used to be Roger Wheeler's pilot.

JE: And which game—

GM: Anywhere there's a football game, he was a dyed-in-the-wool OU.

JE: So it was OU then? All right. So then, you'd fly to any OU games?

GM: Yes, if I could get somebody to fill in for me at the shop, run the shop.

JE: So he'd say, "You get me an early tee time and you can join us on the plane."

GM: Yes. It was always only about three or four would be on the plane, and we'd have a good time.

JE: Well, that was fun, wasn't it?

GM: It was always fun, always fun.

JE: That's how close you were to Roger.

GM: Roger Wheeler and I were good friends.

JE: When you looked in the car, here's your friend.

GM: I didn't recognize him at the time.

JE: Yeah, but you sure knew it in a minute, a second later.

GM: Oh yes, when I got the door open.

JE: Mike Huff, who was a detective on the police force, who I've interviewed about this on voicesofoklahoma.com, says he was the first police official to get to the body.

GM: Yes because I was hollering at them to call the police and call for an ambulance.

JE: Yeah.

GM: And I called his wife.

JE: Roger Wheeler's wife.

GM: Roger's, and told her to go to St. Francis Hospital—

JE: So—

GM: ...because Roger had been shot and, "George, that's not a very nice joke."

I said, "Pat, I'm not joking you. Go to St. Francis Hospital."

And the next thing I see her is trying to get down to the body. The body now is lying on the ground with a sheet on it. She had been out to St. Francis and St. Francis said, "No, the body's not here." So I think it was the Allens, Bob Allen, took her out to Southern Hills and she was fighting, trying to get down.

And I run like hell through the locker room to get out of her way. I did not want to be— I've talked to her a lot since then, but you just do not get over something like that.

JE: No.

GM: And in an hour or so. And then I had to go home. I had to tell the wife to go on and I'd be home, I do not know, because the police were wanting me to go down to the police department and tell them what I'd seen and what I'd done and everything else. Those things, they get to you.

JE: Yeah.

GM: But he was a good, he was a good man.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

GM: And what had happened, he had bought Hi-li.

JE: Yep.

GM: He was not going to give them any kickback and they bumped him off.

JE: Yep. The Mafia.

GM: Yes.

JE: And you can hear that entire story with Mike Huff on voicesofoklahoma.com. So then the media would come out and maybe the media want to interview you—

GM: Oh heck yes.

JE: ...and the newspapers and talk to you and you were the first one to see him. Maybe that went on for several days.

GM: And the last one to see him too.

JE: Alive, yeah. They were wanting to talk to you too so you couldn't just release it that day, the days afterward too.

GM: That is correct.

JE: They wanted to talk to you. National media got ahold of this as well. I don't think there was always a gate.

GM: No there was not. When Roger was shot there was no gate. That's what brought the gate on.

JE: Okay, so that's why they put it on. Because the Mafia just drove right in.

GM: That is correct. It was one of those things.

Chapter 13 - 6:40

Roy D. Mercer

John Erling: The golf course had a dress code.

George Matson: Yes.

JE: What was that dress code?

GM: You must have a collared shirt, shirts had to be tucked in, and certain length shorts.

JE: And then the ladies?

GM: Ladies had to have tucked in shirts too and they had to have certain length shorts as well.

JE: Some ladies would come out and maybe their skirts were too short?

GM: Yes.

JE: And you'd have to?

GM: I'd have to tell them, "I'm sorry, the dress code is so many inches."

JE: Yeah. Would you have people who were not members? This is a golf course and I'm here and—

GM: Oh I guess people would come up.

JE: ...I want to play golf.

GM: That is correct.

JE: And you'd have to tell them?

GM: "I'm sorry, you must be a member here at Southern Hills." You ever see that Roy D. Mercer thing? Can I have short shorts? They gave me hell.

JE: This is a good point here then, to bring that up because Roy D. Mercer was a character and a team of Phil and Brent on KMOD in the morning. Roy D. Mercer called people and put them on.

GM: Right.

JE: One day, Roy D. Mercer calls you.

GM: That is correct.

JE: And what happened?

GM: Roy D. called me and he gibbered, you know, so I couldn't understand what he was saying half the time. And he told me and some other people were invited to play golf at Southern Hills Country Club and to tell them, "We have a dress code here. We have got T-shirts."

I said, "No sir." There were just giving me hell for the sake of it.

JE: And then, of course, he'd say, "How come I don't give you an ass-whipping?"

GM: Ass-whipping, yeah. And he was going to come down. I said, "Well, I've had one or two and I've give one or two myself, so you'd better be a good man."

JE: Well, you know what, George? This would be a good time to listen to that right now. Let's listen to it.

GM: Okay.

[recording start]

[phone ringing]

George Matson: Golf Club, George speaking.

Roy D. Mercer: Is this George?

GM: Uh-huh (affirmative).

RM: George, my name is Roy Mercer. I was calling y'all. My wife, Sarah Jean, won a contest in a magazine.

GM: Uh-huh (affirmative).

RM: At art contest, and won a free round of golf down there with y'all. And I was gonna call and try to set that up sometime this afternoon.

GM: She won it at Southern Hills?

RM: Yes sir, well, it's a Tulsa area craft kit yearly magazine was running an art contest.

GM: Uh-huh (affirmative).

RM: And she done a portrait of that Jack Nicholson.

GM: Uh-huh (affirmative).

RM: That golden bear. She done it out of colored sand, and it won.

GM: Aah.

RM: And we're getting a round of golf for four and lunch out there to your clubhouse and I need, they said to call George and he'd fix it up.

GM: Umm.

RM: So I need, I got four folks that's ready to come out there. Can we get on some time between maybe one and two this afternoon?

GM: Not today. I, let me—

RM: Well, they said we can come up there anytime this week and do it. And I figured today I got the day off.

GM: Uh-huh (affirmative).

RM: And I got my buddies, a couple of buddies, and my boy Raymond gonna play with us too out there.

GM: Uh-huh (affirmative).

RM: And we was hoping to get off there some time this afternoon.

GM: Let me see.

RM: Do we all have to have clubs?

GM: Yes sir.

RM: Hmm. Cause we only got one set between me and the boy.

GM: Um-hmm (affirmative). You need, everybody has to have a set of clubs.

RM: Well, they said that y'all would provide them if we didn't have clubs for everybody.

GM: Who did, who said that?

RM: The Tulsa area craft kit yearly magazine.

GM: Um-hmm (affirmative).

RM: Tacky magazine.

GM: Hold on, I'll—

RM: I'm supposed to have golf for four and I guess I'm going to need three sets of clubs. And they said something about a dress code out there.

GM: Yes, hold on a second, I'm going to switch you to the manager.

RM: No, I need, they said talk to George, is who I needed to talk to.

GM: Who told you, who told you that, who told you this?

RM: That was some lady down there to the magazine, Diane Ross down there to the magazine.

GM: And this is a maga—what was the name of the magazine?

RM: *Tulsa Area Craft Kit Yearly*, it was a contest. It sounds like you're trying to give me the runaround down there.

GM: No I'm just trying to find out what's going on.

RM: Right.

GM: Cause I don't know about it myself.

RM: What's going on is that me and about three, well, two of my buddies and my boy is going to be there twixt one and two and we're going to play golf on your golf course or there's going to be an ass-whipping.

GM: Pardon?

RM: Well, gonna be an ass-whipping. She won that contest fair and square and we're supposed to come out.

GM: Well, I didn't, did I say she didn't?

RM: Well, no, but you're trying to make it sound like I wasn't going to get to play to your golf course.

GM: No I didn't. I'm just trying to find out, eh, who sponsored this and so forth. I'm just trying to get—

RM: It was an art contest, she worked for about six months and made that Jack Nicholson out of colored, colored sand.

GM: Yes, uh-huh, uh-huh (affirmatives). Well, you come on out then, we'll take care of you.

RM: Is that right?

GM: Yes.

RM: Okay. Then the boy, all's he got jeans, shorts, and T-shirts, is that okay?

GM: No sir, he must have, he must have a shirt with a collar on. Then he must have regular slacks, no jeans.

RM: No jeans and—what kind of place are y'all running down there? I got—

GM: Sir, this is a country club.

RM: How big a boy are you?

GM: Aah, not very big.

RM: Yeah.

GM: Um-hmm (affirmative).

RM: Well, if I whup your ass, can we just wear what we want to out there?

GM: No sir, but it takes a hell of a man to do it.

RM: Well, I'm a hell of a man.

GM: Must be.

RM: You ever had an ass-whupping?

GM: I've had it many a time, I've given to one or two meself.

RM: One or two meself? Where—you're not from here, are you?

GM: No I'm not from here.

RM: Where you from?

GM: Ireland.

RM: Huh?

GM: Ireland.

RM: Isn't that up north of Wagner?

GM: No, that must be out—I'm trying to figure out who this is.

RM: Well, this is Roy Mercer. My wife Sharon Jean Mercer won that contest, in fact, they said they was going to hang that portrait of that Jack Nicholson up in y'all's clubhouse up there. They're going to have a ceremony today.

GM: Uh-huh.

RM: And we'd coming out there. I need two low-salt plates on the lunch.

GM: Uh-huh.

RM: Two low-salt plates and a couple of chicken fries.

GM: Sure.

RM: Okay? And then I, the boy's got a Sonic shirt. Is that okay if he wore that?

GM: No sir, there's—

RM: It's got a collar on it, he's got a collar on it.

GM: No sir.

RM: Oh come on.

GM: No sir. This is something, I'm getting, I'm getting the runaround here—

RM: I'll tell you what, I ain't never—

GM: I'm getting the runaround here from somebody.

RM: Now you're getting the runaround, huh?

GM: Somebody's getting something ?? Somebody's got to be giving me a hell of a—

RM: George, George, George, Phil and Brent—

GM: How's it going?

RM: Well, we're pretty good. Now Dave said it'd be okay if we showed up in a pair of high-top Converse that we'd fixed up with a box of finishing nails for spikes. Ha-ha-ha.

GM: [laughing] I'd sure get hell.

RM: He said—he said that you were the guy that could get us on, no matter what we were wearing.

GM: [laughing] Oh dear. This be fun.

RM: I just make a divot out there and we can bury you in it. How about that, George?

GM: Okay, that'd be good.

[recording end]

JE: So that was kind of fun to listen to that again, wasn't it?

GM: Oh heck yes.

JE: Well, that's a nice memory, and we have it forever.

Chapter 14 - 3:30

Practical Jokes

John Erling: You were so good in the clubhouse in 1983, you were asked by the head pro of the Golf Club of Oklahoma to manage their clubhouse. Did you think about that for some time?

George Matson: I did, I thought about it. I talked to my wife and she says, "You're happy where you are and we're happy, all's going well, we're not going to move."

JE: So you stayed there?

GM: The boss said that, and I said, "Yes, dear."

JE: Right, you got that right. They loved you so much at Southern Hills they commissioned an artist to make a bronze bust of you.

GM: Bronze bust.

JE: And that bronze bust is sitting—

GM: Yes, exactly, that is correct.

- JE:** ...at your apartment here at Inverness Village. There it is. And right now, some of your friends here have put a green hat on.
- GM:** A green hat on. But you know, it was the women, not the men, the women had that bronze bust made.
- JE:** The women of the club?
- GM:** The women golfers.
- JE:** They liked you that much?
- GM:** Yes. The women golfers.
- JE:** Everybody liked George, but particularly the women, and they had that bust made for you.
- GM:** That's correct.
- JE:** And it's a good likeness of you too. So you were blessed with a personality that you figured it was just easy to say hello.
- GM:** I can't change, I can't change my personality, you know what I mean? It's one of those things God's given me.
- JE:** Yep. It's a blessing. Not everybody has that. That was his gift that he gave you.
- GM:** Everything is wonderful.
- JE:** And you made people happy out there.
- GM:** But this is correct, I made a lot of people happy. Oh, there's always one or two disgruntled people.
- JE:** Right.
- GM:** But overall, I kept 99 percent of them happy.
- JE:** I'm sure you did. Bill Dorman was the general manager of Southern Hills.
- GM:** Yes, that old goat.
- JE:** Is there some tricks that you played on each other?
- GM:** Yes, we played a lot of them.
- JE:** And can you tell me some?
- GM:** Yes. One time, it was St. Patrick's Day, and I got a big, big sack of potatoes, opened them up and put them all over his office. The whole sack. It wasn't a cheap sack, it was a big sack. Then he had to get something back on me. Christmastime, Christmas Eve, my wife and I were going to go to church. He got a bunch of geese and put red ribbons around their neck and put them in the back of my pickup. So it took me, oh I'm sure, about ten or fifteen minutes getting those geese out of this.
- JE:** I'm sure.
- GM:** It was all innocent fun.
- JE:** Sure it was. And then you had a car.
- GM:** Yes.

JE: And I believe there was a little messing with the gas mileage.

GM: Yes, I forget about that. The car, one day it would be half full, the next day it would be empty. I kept filling up that car, and they kept draining it out onto, I think it was Dave Rand told me, he said, "They're pulling your leg."

I said, "Well, I'm going to pull their leg." So I went and talked to one of the big car people and I told them I just wanted to borrow it. And I got the fanciest thing I could get, pickup with all these lights and so forth on, and I brought it out to the club.

A doorman come in, I said, "I got drunk and I bought this. You want to see this what I bought?" And all these lights, I said, "Look at the lights."

He said, "What the Devil did you do that?"

I said, "Well, I even told my wife that we'd go to Colorado." Well, there was nothing wrong with the pickup. I said, "Well, I couldn't get it to function properly."

And he admitted that they were playing a trick on me.

And I said, "Bill, did you ever been had?"

Chapter 15 - 3:40

How to Be Remembered

John Erling: And by the way, we celebrate St. Patrick's Day, you know, the way we do here.

George Matson: Yeah.

JE: Did they celebrate the same in Ireland?

GM: No.

JE: We have parades and all that. Did they have parades in Ireland?

GM: Well, they do. In the South of Ireland they've got more parades than they have in the North. Protestant and Catholic. Sure, the Catholics would have.

JE: They had parades and celebrated?

GM: Yes.

JE: More than the Protestants did?

GM: That is correct.

JE: So you live here at Inverness. You're soon to be eighty-nine years old?

GM: That is correct.

JE: You're in good health?

GM: I'm in good health and enjoying life.

JE: And how does it make you feel to soon to be eighty-nine? You think about life, would you like to be younger?

GM: No I wouldn't. I'm enjoying life and I get up every morning and I'll walk for half a mile. My dog and I go out for a walk every morning. And then tonight I will take her out for a walk, we'll have a nice walk. And I love to walk.

JE: Well, it keeps you in shape. You're in great shape, you look great.

GM: I love, I love to walk. Some people say, "Well, we have a fitness place here," but I don't go to it. I take all my exercise walking.

JE: At your age, do you think much about the afterlife?

GM: No.

JE: It doesn't phase you that—

GM: I'm going to be going sometime.

JE: Yeah.

GM: And I'll go and see my wife.

JE: Yeah.

GM: That's all I look forward to.

JE: Amen. Young people like to talk to elder people about life. What advice would you give to young people?

GM: Hmm, that's a hard one. I'd say, "Keep on going and do the best you can. Now don't push your way around. Just enjoy life as you're doing it."

JE: And a lot of people say, "Do what you like to do." You enjoyed that clubhouse for fifty-five years, and that's why you stuck with it because you enjoyed people.

GM: I enjoyed the people.

JE: Yeah.

GM: The people, you know, I had wonderful people, wonderful people. They were good to me, fifty-five years. The ladies, not the men. The ladies had that bronze bust cast for me.

JE: Yeah, I'd be proud of that too if it was the ladies who did that for me.

GM: The ladies did that for me.

JE: Right. How would you like to be remembered?

GM: As sweet old George. I'm doing the best I can.

JE: I believe too, when you talk about sweet old George you remain an honorary member.

GM: Member.

JE: So you can go out there and play anytime you want.

GM: Anytime I want to. Well, things are changing somewhat. I do not drive anymore. I'm not going to kill anybody on the road with my car.

JE: Yeah.

GM: So I just called him one day and I said, "Jordie, come and get the car. I'm not going to drive."

"You have a wreck?"

I said, “No, I’m not going to drive anybody. Nobody has talked to me or anything else, but I’m not going to drive anymore. I’m enjoying life and I’ve got a great place here. What do I need a car for?”

JE: Well, that was very smart. And a lot of times that’s a big fight in families, of course, as you know.

GM: Yes.

JE: And because you live here at Inverness, you hear other people talk who are of our age. And you hear some of these issues that go on, and you were smart to do that. There will be a lot of people listen to this and they’ll have fond memories of Golf Shop George.

GM: George.

JE: And thank you for sharing your—

GM: You’re welcome.

JE: In this wonderful Irish accent.

GM: If anybody enjoys it, it’s wonderful.

JE: Yeah.

GM: I cannot tell it.

JE: And we love it, it’s—

GM: And it’s not put on, as you know yourself.

JE: No, no, great Irish accent. Thank you. We’re glad you didn’t like Brooklyn, and we’re glad you came here. So thank you, George, for telling us—

GM: I’m so happy. Thank you very much. And I’ve enjoyed every minute I’m living here.

JE: That’s great. Thank you.

GM: Thank you.

Chapter 16 - 0:33

Conclusion

Announcer: This oral history presentation is made possible through the support of our generous foundation-funders. We encourage you to join them by making your donation, which will allow us to record future stories. Students, teachers, and librarians are using this website for research and the general public is listening every day to these great Oklahomans share their life experience. Thank you for your support as we preserve Oklahoma’s legacy one voice at a time, on VoicesofOklahoma.com.