

Chapter 01 - 1:07

Introduction

Announcer: The original star maker, legendary music impresario Dr. Jim Halsey has set the standard in the music industry for over 60 years. In his honored career, Jim has guided; and in many cases discovered - world famous household names such as The Oak Ridge Boys, Roy Clark, Hank Thompson and Reba McEntire, to name but a few.

He founded The Jim Halsey Music Business Institute with educational programs at universities in Oklahoma City and Tulsa, Oklahoma. He continued to develop the program in Nashville and beyond, collecting and curating interviews and information from leaders throughout the entertainment and music business.

Halsey has represented and guided the careers as a manager or booking agent - for nearly thirty members of the Country Music Hall of Fame, to whom countless ACM, CMA, GRAMMYs and number one singles and platinum albums have been awarded.

In 1990, he sold his agency and founded the Jim Halsey Music Business Institute, wanting to focus on helping others pursue their dreams and be successful in the music industry. Listen to Jim talk about his remarkable career and the advice he offers young entertainers...on the oral history website VoicesofOklahoma.com.

Chapter 02 - 9:10

Impresario

John Erling: My name is John Erling. And today's date is April 23, 2010. Jim, would you state your full name, please? And your date of birth and your present age.

Jim Halsey: I'm Jim Halsey. My date of birth is October 7, 1930, so I am seventy-nine years old right now.

JE: I got to say, you don't look seventy-nine years old at all.

JH: No, I stay busy.

JE: [laughing] Where are we recording this interview?

JH: We're recording it in our building in Mounds, Oklahoma. It's not really an office, it's kind of a quasi-museum and storage place.

JE: Let's go to the beginning, where were you born?

JH: I was born in Independence, Kansas, which is north of Tulsa, about seventy-five, eighty miles on Highway 75.

JE: Talk about your mother, your mother's name?

JH: My mother's name was Carrie Mesic Halsey.

JE: Was she born in Kansas?

JH: No, she was born in South Keeny, Indian Territory, in 1902.

JE: Here in Oklahoma?

JH: In Oklahoma, right. And my dad was born in Chetopa, Kansas. My family has a long history in Kansas, the Halsey part of it, as my great grandfather ran a stagecoach line from Ft. Scott, Baxter Springs, to Oswego to Chetopa, Kansas. The railroad ended at Ft. Scott at that time, this is like in the 1870s. He would pick them up in this beautiful stagecoach and bring them on to Oswego and Chetopa.

And then my grandfather and my great uncle, Harry Halsey and Will Halsey, William Halsey, moved to Independence, Kansas, in the early 1900s and opened the Halsey Brothers Department Store in 1907. That's where I grew up.

I was born in 1930, and of course, the store was up and running at full blast, and that was during the Depression. But we still maintained the store open.

JE: Back to your mother then, she was born in Indian Territory.

JH: Right.

JE: Was she a Cherokee then?

JH: Well, that's where I got my Cherokee blood. My mother was a quarter, so I'm an eighth Cherokee.

JE: Then your father's name?

JH: Harry Halsey, Harry E. Halsey.

JE: And he came from where?

JH: He was born in Chetopa, Kansas.

JE: How was it that your mother and your father ever meet?

JH: Well, my mother eventually became a registered nurse and worked at the Mercy Hospital in Independence, Kansas. And that's where my dad and my mother met.

JE: Then you've already alluded to but tell us again what your father did for a living.

JH: Well, he was in the Halsey Department Store. He was one of the marketers and

advertisers, creative people there, he was a great designer of windows. People would come from all over southeastern Kansas and northeastern Oklahoma to see the Halsey Brothers Department Store windows. Because they were something like out of Kansas City or Tulsa, they were beautiful.

But that's where I got my main interest early on in selling and marketing, hanging around the store.

JE: At a very early age?

JH: Right. I was there all the time and even delivered packages when I had my bicycle.

JE: Your elementary school was what?

JH: The Washington School in Independence, Kansas.

JE: And then you went to junior high school there?

JH: Right, and high school, and went to the Independence Junior College. I went to Kansas University for a little bit, and that's where I got my education, or part of it, anyway.

JE: Your brothers and sisters?

JH: I had a brother, William, and he was in the store and eventually he became involved with Sinclair Oil Company.

JE: Music that you grew up, that you remember junior high and high school, who were some of your favorites?

JH: Of course, I grew up with Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys because of KVOO's daily broadcast. But I like the jazzy swing part of that and all the solos and the inspiration that came from that. But I was a big band listener. And I hung out at the record stores, and it was Woody Herman and Stan Kenton and Duke Ellington and Count Basie and Lionel Hampton and all of those great big bands.

I was a player myself, I played saxophone and thought I wanted to make music my career until I graduated from high school. And that summer I went around and saw some big bands, I saw Woody Herman's band. I saw Duke Ellington's band and Johnny Hodges playing saxophone. I knew right then if I lived to be a thousand I'd never be good enough to play like those guys played.

JE: But that was a dream at first?

JH: That was a dream but also in high school I read a book in my senior year that I made a book report on called *Sol Hurok Impresario*. He was the great Impresario that brought all the great Russian accent dancers, the ballet companies, to the United States. He was Russian himself. He was the only one that really imported them here. And I thought, "Boy, that's a glamorous life. I think maybe I'll become an impresario."

JE: What is an impresario?

JH: An impresario is a presenter of performers, artists, and shows. Now Roy Clark tells a story that during that time I went to these bands and I would see the bands all get off the big

band bus and go in and set their stuff up and there was always a Cadillac parked around somewhere. And I asked somebody, I said, "Who's that Cadillac belong to?"

They said, "That's the band manager."

And Roy said, "That's what got me interested in being a manager." Now maybe that's partly true or not, but he has a good time telling that story.

JE: So that book then was a change for you in your life?

JH: It was an inspiration. Now I've gone back and read the book several times since then and it really wasn't that inspiring to me but it was at that time because I was living in Independence, Kansas, and here's this great promoter of shows presenting shows at Carnegie Hall and the Metropolitan Opera and places all around the world. And, you know, he's always appearing at the opening and had his cape over his shoulders and his cane with the gold head on it, the silk top hat, and lots of press and lots of action. I thought, "That's for me. I'll become the impresario of southeastern Kansas."

JE: That seed was planted then in high school?

JH: Right. So my first year in junior college, actually, it was my second year, 1949, I listened to Leon McAuliffe as well on KVOO and he had this great western swing band. And I wrote his manager, Mr. C. M. Cooksey, and told him I wanted to promote Leon in Independence, he'd never been there. We had a great auditorium.

We made our deal, made the terms, and he came up, Leon did. And it was a fantastic crowd.

Now how did I promote that? I knew enough about selling and marketing from my folks' department store that I knew you had to advertise. If you had a good piece of product you have to get it to people that are interested in buying that product. You know, that's the first rule in any kind of marketing. And then, how do you do that?

Well, I didn't take any chances, I did everything from posters, I put posters out everywhere, I advertised in the paper, on the radio station, and I had a list of customers of my dad's store, this was kind of like the first, for me anyway, marketing with direct mail. And I got some of my other friends that had a furniture store and I used their list of customers and I sent out a little postcard. At that time the postcards were a penny, so you could send a ton of them.

So it was a big success. We were full, sold every ticket.

JE: And you were how old at that time?

JH: I was nineteen.

JE: There was something natural about you though at that time that could pick up on all the nuances of promotion.

JH: Well, I guess I've always been a promoter. Ever since I was a kid I had the idea of doing something and creating an event. I didn't know it at that time but I like to do events. And I still like to do events. That's my motto: Let's make an event out of it. Like we are today,

we're not just recording this. My wife, Minisa, is videotaping this and we'll probably sell millions of them out there, you know, in the hinterlands.

JE: [laughing] Leon McAuliffe is your first act?

JH: Right.

JE: I bet he was surprised when he came to town.

JH: He was. And Mr. Cooksey came up, Mr. Cooksey at that time, went with Leon on almost all the dates, and he was there taking the tickets and counting the money. And then they'd drive back to Tulsa and Leon would do the show. So he was surprised. And we hit it off really well. And as a result, I promoted a lot of dates with Leon.

But from Leon I got my confidence up and I started promoting everything that I could feel would make some money in that town, including wrestling, circuses, an ice show. Independence happens to be a really good show town because it's kind of centered between Kansas City and Tulsa and Wichita on one side and Springfield and Joplin on the other. So there were a lot of bands that would come through. At that time everybody traveled by bus. They would pick that as kind of his halfway point to do.

So I got good deals and I did a good job. In a lot of places I would do more business than they would do in the cities. So I had everybody from Stan Kenton to Count Basie to Woody Herman to Ray Anthony, Jimmy Dorsey, Carmen Cavallaro, all those big bands at that time that were traveling and doing the one-night circuit.

JE: You obviously spun off Leon McAuliffe and then you could tell the next act, the next act, "Well, I did this, I did this," and—

JH: Right.

JE: ... it began to build for you.

JH: Right. And then that word gets around to the various booking agencies that's here's a spot that you can make some money in.

JE: Yeah.

Chapter 03 - 5:35

Hank Thompson

John Erling: There's a guy by the name of Hank Thompson you meet.

Jim Halsey: Right. I met Hank the next year in 1950. Not only did we have a successful first date there that I played him in Independence, then we started branching out and Hank said, "Well, why don't you take two days?" Eventually, by the time I became Hank's manager, which was in 1951, I was up to playing maybe eight or ten days, every time he

would come through this part of the country. From Ft. Smith to Muskogee to Poteau down at Taylor End, and Poteau.

Finally, in 1951, he called me and he said, “My manager and agent,” at that time was a guy by the name of John Hit, “is going with MCA. I’m looking for another manager and agent. I think we hit it off, you’ve done a really good job. How would you like to handle everything that I do?”

Well, one of the things that I learned early on—I still teach this to my students and if I give a lecture—we all get a lot of opportunities in our life. And the thing is, we not only have to recognize those opportunistic times that come to us, we have to act on them. I mean, there are a lot of people that get opportunities and you say, “Wow, why didn’t you do that?”

“Well, I was going to think about it a while.”

Well, sometimes you don’t have time to think. It didn’t take me long to say to Hank, “Let’s make a deal.”

JE: And you were twenty-one at the time.

JH: Right.

JE: Nineteen fifty-one.

JH: Right.

JE: That was considered young, perhaps, in the world of managers?

JH: It was.

JE: Because you took that deal he soon comes along with a pretty big song.

JH: That was timing. I think a lot of us if we look at our opportunities, timing is coming and you don’t really know what it is. Four months later in the spring of 1952, Capitol Records released the biggest record that Hank ever had, “Wild Side of Life.” It stayed number one on the charts for twenty weeks. It sold over a million copies. And we were on our way then.

We’d had a plan and everything I do I make a plan and usually I write down. We had a plan when we started, Hank and I together, what we wanted to accomplish. And part of what we wanted to accomplish was to expand the territories. Even though he’d had big records on Capitol Records he basically played the Southwest, the West Coast. He hadn’t done the East Coast, he hadn’t done the big ballrooms up through the Midwest. I was familiar with the big bands, I knew where they played up in Wisconsin and Minnesota and Iowa and Nebraska. There were ballrooms up there that had bands almost every night and you’d be a whole tour there.

I never played any of those. And we were the first western swing or country act to ever play those big ballrooms. The Prom in Omaha, and the Pla-Mor in Kansas City, and the Terp in Austin, Minnesota, and the Surf in Clear Lake, Iowa. No country act had ever played those before.

In fact, in Austin, Minnesota, Hank set a new record up there. The record on the wall said: Glen Miller played here in 1938 and set the all-time record of 2,300 people, or whatever it was. Well, Hank set that new record and Hank still has that record.

The ballroom still stands. The guy that promoted us there, this was in 1952, was a young disc jockey, and he was younger than I was, he was a couple of years younger than I was, on the air, the guy by the name of Johnny Western.

And Johnny Western, in fact, he's retiring this weekend, he's with the Journal Broadcasting Group in Wichita with one of their stations there. He wrote *Have Gun Will Travel*. He became quite famous as a songwriter and a sidekick of Gene Autry.

A lot of people, if they're still alive, I still am in contact with them.

JE: How old would Hank have been about this time?

JH: Hank was about four years older than I was, so he was about twenty-five.

JE: What kind of a guy was he to be around?

JH: Well, first of all, he was one of the most brilliant people that I have ever known in my life. He was a true intellectual. And he had one of those positive attitudes.

I was that way always in my life too, but it just seemed to strengthen my whole philosophy of positive thinking.

Now what we're talking about here is a lot about the past, we're reviewing the past. We just had a new exhibition open down at the Oklahoma History Center that is a reflection of the past. It's sixty years of all the gold and platinum albums and memorabilia of all the big stars that I've worked with. But I look at that as something in the past, hoping that's going to give people inspiration for the future. Because I'm thinking ahead now.

JE: He became your friend maybe, your mentor.

JH: Friend, friend and mentor and top client for years and years and it was through Hank that I really learned the business.

JE: You refer to something as "power of performance." What is that?

JH: Right. It's our own performance. We all have a performance to give. You and I are giving one right now. My wife, Minisa, is giving one, she's sitting behind the camera. It's all about that. Some of us do that performance on stage, some of us do it behind a desk with a telephone or computer, some of us are out here building roads and fixing bridges and things. Our performance is what we develop through our life to do the best that we can do.

The part of my philosophy is always not just to be the best human being that I can be, but to give the best performance from my side of the table that I can give. Whether it's with my community, my family, my business, or the artists that I'm involved with.

JE: Yeah.

Chapter 04 - 4:55
We Have a Problem

John Erling: You had somebody working with you by the name of Leo Zayblan.

Jim Halsey: Right. Leo was a great mentor of mine and I met him originally, he was in Chicago. He was with another—I've had some really great mentors in my life—this other gentleman's name was Norman Wiser. Norman Wiser was the publisher of *DownBeat* magazine. Leo was his like right hand guy and assistant. Leo Zayblan was the press guy for Mike Todd, the guy that did *Around the World in Eighty Days*.

JE: Wasn't he the first husband of Elizabeth Taylor?

JH: Oh, one of them anyway. Mike Todd was.

I met Leo in Chicago at *DownBeat* magazine. They were putting together a big show for Soldiers Field in Chicago, a hundred thousand people there. It was going to be a gigantic, they called it Star Night. At that time, it was everybody from Eddie Fisher to Gene Krupa to Lionel Hampton to Ella Fitzgerald to Patty Paige. All of the big stars of that particular day, which was 1953. So I thought, "It would be interesting to be the first country act to be on there."

So I made an appointment with Norman Wiser, the publisher of *DownBeat*. And I went to Chicago and I went in and I made my presentation of why they should have the number one western swing band, Hank Thompson, on that show. They'd never heard of Hank and they weren't too interested in country music. But they were so intrigued by the fact that it would be different. And here's a twenty-two-year-old kid in here talking about it.

Leo was the right hand person and the one that is putting this together. So we did it and it was successful.

I remember all these great people, of course, Gene Krupa and Lionel Hampton I was really, they were kind of like my idols.

Leo eventually retired from all of that press and PR and he published another magazine and he became a mentor and just introduced me to a lot of pe—he knew everybody. Being in Chicago and the newspaper business he knew all those guys that ran those clubs that eventually went to Las Vegas and they were running the casinos and the hotels out there.

Leo was a source of a lot of introduction. I eventually moved him to Tulsa, he wasn't doing anything and I said, "Why don't you come down here?" He didn't have any financial problems so he moved down here and came into our office every day. And he kind of directed our company's present PR in house. At that time, everything was still newspapers, so he would stop at the *Tulsa World*. All the newspapers exchanged newspapers with each other. Now everything is done on internet and you don't have to do it. But he'd be there;

he would read forty, fifty newspapers every day and go to the entertainment sections and say, "Oh, there's a new ballroom opening in Milwaukee." Or, "There's a new club in Atlanta." He was an invaluable source of information, which at that time was really important because there wasn't an internet or a Google or Facebook or anything that you could go to and get all that information.

So we had inside information daily before it became general knowledge.

JE: But you with your positive attitude, he would greet you every day in a certain way.

JH: "We've got a problem." Well, generally, there was a situation, a problem of some kind. So I finally told him, I said, "Leo, you know I'm very positive and every day does have a lot of problems and we most generally solve all of them. But I really would appreciate it if you wouldn't greet me every day and say, 'Jim, we've got a problem.'"

So I came in, it was almost the next day, and he had remembered our conversation. I thought I might have hurt his feelings even. He came out and he was kind of stuttering out and he says, "Jim, we've got a situation today."

Well, I thought that was pretty good. I said, "Leo, what's the situation?"

He said, "Well, the MGM Hotel in Las Vegas is on fire and it's burning down and we have the Oak Ridge Boys opening there Thursday night."

I said, "Now that is a problem, Leo, that really is."

But, you know, we did solve that too. We came in and we assessed the thing, we talked to our contacts in Vegas. There was a number of people lost their lives in that fire and the hotel was closed for some months.

Well, all of a sudden, I had two weeks of the Oak Ridge Boys, one of my big grossing artists, fall out. Not only did we need the revenue because we had band to pay and the ongoing expenses, but that was part of the way we made our profit too, after you pay all your expenses.

So I called my staff together and explained the situation. I said, "We've got to go out and we've got to salvage these two weeks. Now we need to canvass everything because there's probably somebody that has gotten sick somewhere and they're not going to be able to make the date, somebody's looking for a short notice deal." We called and made our television solicitations, in fact, we finally got a couple of TV dates. We got Carson to take a date on the Oaks. So we salvaged the dates pretty well. We didn't salvage all of the revenue but we made a positive thing out of losing those two weeks.

Chapter 05 - 3:17**Minisa**

John Erling: Let's talk about Minisa, who is helping here, and she is videotaping this. How did the two of you meet? And a little bit about Minisa's background and her father.

Jim Halsey: Well, Minisa was born in Tulsa. When she was born here her father, Woody Crumbo, was artist in residence at the Gilcrease. He was one of Tom Gilcrease's close associates and they went out and they acquired a lot of the art that you see in there now. Woody knew where a lot of these wonderful pieces were and the people that had them and was largely responsible for a lot of the original things.

But Minisa and I met in 1975, and it was like we were supposed to get together somewhere. I went to a different part of Tulsa that I normally go to for lunch, for some reason. I drove miles away to go to lunch. It was in London Square. I was walking down, just kind of wondering why I was here and looking in the windows and stuff. And there was a radio station blaring, they were playing it through the loud speakers. And they said, "Today is the last day of the Minisa Crumbo art show at Coleman Galleries," which was like such-and-such South Lewis."

And I looked up and I said, "What? That's next door." I was a collector of American Indian art and I knew Woody Crumbo, of course, was the master of all of us, as far as I was concerned. Minisa Crumbo.

Well, I went next door and it was just magical, like one of those things we were supposed to have gotten together. I came in and she wasn't there and I liked what she was doing and pretty soon she comes in from her lunch. And we met. I knew that that was the person that I had been looking for all my life.

That was in 1975.

JE: Did she know that you were the person that she'd been looking for all her life?

JH: Well, well, I think so. She said she did. She had seen me in a vision one time. I had appeared in a vision.

Then she left for Egypt and the tour in Italy and I left for the Soviet Union with Roy Clark. And then we met up after that and we continued our relationship. We got married in 1980 and we just celebrated thirty years.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative). You have children?

JH: She has two by a previous marriage and I have two.

JE: Are your children involved with you in the business?

JH: Well, Sherman is. Sherman, my son, is a great filmmaker. He does all of Tim McGraw's—he's done like thirty-nine videos for Tim that he produces and directs. He's produced and directed Tim's three NBC specials.

He just did a piece here, which is kind of interesting, with Tim, when Tim was in Tulsa at the BOK Center. A lot of people don't even know it but he videoed one song in that show that will be aired in the fall of 2010 in a Kenny Rogers special. Kenny Rogers did the special at Foxwoods in Connecticut.

Sherman left here and went back there so when they have the Kenny Rogers special, which will have Dolly, Wynonna, Lionel Richie, Smokey Robinson, and a whole host of others, they'll say, "And from Tulsa, Oklahoma, of the BOK Center, Tim McGraw paying tribute to Kenny Rogers." And he sings one of Kenny's songs.

Chapter 06 - 8:30

Roy Clark

John Erling: Roy Clark, how did you meet him?

Jim Halsey: Well, I met Roy Clark through Wanda Jackson. I met Wanda Jackson through Hank Thompson. We were doing a television show in Oklahoma City with Hank Thompson on a weekly basis and there was this young girl that came down to appear on the show. She was still in high school, her name was Wanda Jackson. Then eventually, Wanda had her own records and I became her first agent.

When I made a deal to go to Las Vegas with her for a long period of time with her Good Show opening, a show in the main spotlight, that was going to be in 1960. So in 1959, at the end of 1959, she said, "I'm going to put together a really good band. I've found this guitar player in Washington, DC, that I've hired to front my band."

That was Roy Clark. I didn't know anything about Roy Clark. But she told me what a great performer and singer, songwriter, musician, and guitar player. Well, there was no way she could really explain how great Roy Clark was, or still is.

I saw him and I thought, "Wow, this is one of the greatest performers I've ever seen in my life."

JE: Where did you see him?

JH: I saw him in Independence, Kansas. I was promoting Wanda Jackson there on a date in late November. And that was Roy's first date with Wanda. This was the show and it was going to be kind of a good place to look at what the show's going to be like going into Vegas. Make any tweaks if we needed to do that. Oh, he was fabulous.

We became friends.

JE: He was known then as an instrumentalist more.

JH: Primarily, right. And—

JE: Did he show his comedic side at that time too?

JH: Always, always, yeah. And a good singer. But nobody ever really thought of him as a singer. At that time, your country singers were more like Hank Thompson and Ernest Tubb and Roy Acuff and that. That just wasn't Roy, Roy was more of a pop, jazzy, blues type of singer.

He stayed with Wanda for about a year, a little over a year, a year and a half maybe, and finally he said, "Let's head out on our own and do it."

So we would go back to the same places that played Wanda and played Hank and all those places knew Roy and loved him, said, "Well, we'll try it."

One of the first dates that I ever booked him on was a friend of mine, Harry Peoples, Hap Peoples from Wichita, Kansas, big promoter, he would always take out these package shows for ten days. He was taking a package show out that had every star imaginable at that time from Faron Young to Ferlin Husky to Hank Snow. I can't remember who all they were but there were like six or eight really big stars. Nobody knew Roy Clark.

And I said, "Just give me twenty minutes."

Hap said, "I don't even have any money."

I said, "Will you pay his hotel?"

"I'll pay his hotel and we'll feed him."

So Roy went out on the tour. Of course, when he opened the tour and did his twenty minutes nobody could follow him, I mean, he was just sensational. Where did this guy come from? Maybe he was a better show than Elvis Presley.

And one by one, every artist on that show would come to Hap Peoples, saying, "Hap, listen, you know, I'd like to get out of here early. Why don't you put me on before that new guy you've got?"

And by the end of the tour, this unknown Roy Clark was closing the touring. Nobody knew him. They knew him after that tour. The last day was in Wichita. People yelled and screamed, they were throwing babies in the air, it's just a sensational thing, audience was unbelievable.

So I called an audio recorder, the guy had a recording studio up there. I said, "I want you to come in and record this show because I want to get Roy Clark on the end of it so I can pass it around to other promoters."

He brought his equipment in, it cost me a lot of money, I paid for it. Came in and recorded it and when it was over with I came in and he says, "I've got it, it's perfect. And you're going to love what I did. I was able to cut all of that audience noise out." He said, "It's just pure Roy, we don't have any of the audience yelling and screaming."

Well, I couldn't use the tape. I guess he thought I was going to make a record out of it. That was partially my fault for not telling him. I said, "I want to get that audience yelling and screaming." But I figured it was just such a happening that he would know that.

But that helped us with other promoters, they heard about this guy playing guitar.

JE: I think you make a good learning point right here that we can't assume that everybody thinks the way we do.

JH: Right.

JE: You may either from training or just naturally think the way you do but so often you have found in your career that the obvious to you is not nearly the obvious to somebody else.

JH: And that goes just with the common things. I have a part in my book, in the *Starmaker* book, which is published by Tate Publishing in Oklahoma, in Mustang, Oklahoma. I have a couple of pages about never assume. Never assume that the hotel's going to be good. Never assume that you're going to get paid. Never assume that the food's good. Never assume all these things. Never assume that they're going to have enough sound or enough lights or enough press or that they've even advertised.

JE: You shopped Roy Clark around then, didn't you?

JH: Right.

JE: To a lot of people.

JH: Right.

JE: And you went out to the West Coast.

JH: Right.

JE: I think there was a guy by the name of Jack Webb.

JH: Oh, my, yes. Jack Webb.

JE: Tell us who Jack Webb was.

JH: Well, for those who don't know, Jack Webb was an infamous guy on *Dragnet* that was the detective and, you know, "Just the facts, ma'am." That's kind of the way he was in person. Well, he was also a producer. He was a big star, he starred in that show forever, he made that show.

My contacts at Capitol Records and the people involved there said that there's going to be a new television series called *No Time for Sergeants*. That was a takeoff of the movie and he Broadway show. And they're looking for a star in that. "Would you be interested in submitting Roy Clark?"

Which I did. I submitted Roy. And Jack Webb at Warner Brothers was producing that series. His people said, "We'll test Roy. We'll screen test him."

At that time, you know, none of us had a lot of money, we drove to California, Roy and I did. And they gave us about two and a half days to read the script. And he had it down perfect. He is a good actor and he was a quick study, but he had it down.

So we get into Hollywood the night before and get a good night's rest because we want to be perfect out there. We're at Warner Brothers at ten sharp, when our appointment is, and go in. I've never seen an office as big as Jack Webb's. It was cavernous.

The receptionist said, “Mr. Webb will be here in a little bit. He’s expecting you.” And ushered us in.

Pretty soon somebody came in, kind of like announcing an important person coming in and say, “Mr. Webb is on his way, he’ll be here within the minute.”

We could hear him walking down the hall, there was a marble hall and he had on leather heels. I remember that and you could hear that click, click, click coming down the hall.

I got to tell you, both of our palms of our hands were a little sweaty because this was maybe the opportunity to get a network television show with Roy Clark starring in it. What better way to promote our future big star here than that.

In he walks with his assistant. I’m standing there with Roy, we both stood up. I held my hand out, I said, “Mr. Webb, I’m Jim Halsey.”

Roy said, “Mr. Webb, I’m Roy Clark.”

Jack Webb just looked him up and down, sized him up, and looked at his assistant. Instead of saying, “Hello,” or “Thank you for coming,” or anything, he looks to his assistant and says, “Too fat.” Two words—too fat. Did a military about face and he was out of that room.

It was just kind of stunning, you know, it just, we didn’t know what to say. We just looked at each other. In a situation like that a lot of times there’s nothing you can do except if you can laugh, and we did, it was just so ridiculous we just laughed.

But that was a good learning for us too. But it opened a lot of doors. We made other contacts there that were valuable for something else that we did or other events that we did. We were in California, the people at Capitol Records still were concerned about where we were going with Roy record-wise. It gave them confidence that at least here’s a guy that wants it and he’ll go after it.

Chapter 07 - 6:00

Hee Haw

John Erling: So you suffered a rejection there? In your long career we see a lot of accomplishments but there had to be a ton of rejection?

Jim Halsey: Right. For every sale there are a lot of rejections.

JE: So how would you handle that?

JH: First of all, you have to expect it, that maybe there’s a good reason for the rejection.

Maybe it doesn’t fit with what they’re looking for. Maybe it’s not going to work and who knows why they reject it. But you have to accept that as part of your learning experience

and go on. Because if you never put your foot in the door you're not going to get in and really tell them what you're about.

I think every salesperson knows this whether they're selling encyclopedias door to door or Electrolux vacuum cleaners or the guy on the automobile lot that's got this beautiful car that he can't sell or she can't sell. It's just another step. Rejection, to me, as always been, "Somebody out there will buy this."

JE: But it's natural for us to take it personally.

JH: It is and you've got to get past that. Just like the songwriter, which really is something personal, the songwriters put their heart in the music there and then when somebody says, "Not for me," you're more likely to take that personal. I've always been a salesperson so I know that if I'm going to make a sale I've got to get past some noes.

JE: Yeah. On Roy Clark, after all that, when did he really make it big and how does *Hee Haw* play into this story?

JH: Well, Roy was a big star before *Hee Haw* because we had a number of records. He had a record called "Yesterday When I Was Young," in 1967. It sold a million copies and really got him the recognition that he needed. But he was such a personal personality for television that we had already pretty well established him as a big star. He had done the *Tonight Show*, he'd done *Merv Griffin*, *Mike Douglas*, *Dinah Shore*, *Joey Bishop*, all those shows that had millions of viewers and Roy was popular on all of them because he could do anything. He could do comedy, he could sing, he could play the guitar, play the banjo, play the fiddle. So we didn't have the niche for him that say, "Well, he doesn't have the record." He didn't need the record, he was an entertainer. So he had done the *Tonight Show*.

Then I met a very interesting guy by the name of Paul Henning. He and I became good friends and I talked him into putting Roy on one of those *Beverly Hillbillies* shows. They wrote his part in as Cousin Roy Halsey—they used my last name, which was a surprise to me.

Roy was so good, Roy went back and did a number of those, not only did he play Cousin Roy Halsey, but he dressed in drag, he kind of followed Jonathan Winters, and he was Big Mama Halsey. So he did a dual part on it.

Well, in the realm of all the television shows we did from Dean Martin's to a whole bunch, I ran into a guy by the name of Bernie Brillstein. Bernie Brillstein was one of the great innovators and promoters and salesmen and managers and he had a show called *Laugh-In*. And he said, "We're doing a special this summer. It's a country music takeoff on *Laugh-In*."

He had a couple of guys from Canada, Frank Peppiot and John Elsworth that were involved in that and they had written *Hee Haw*. He said, "We'd like to have Roy come in and host it."

So we decided to do that and we came into Nashville to do that. We did one show. Then they brought in Buck Owens to be cohost. Well, that was different than the original deal. The original deal was Roy was going to host it. Said, "Well, this just gives us a little more play, Buck had some big number-one records all in a row there." And they said, "A little more strength then to do this."

And I said, "Okay."

Well, we did it. The show was against everything that Roy and I had been fighting for for years. The bales of hay, the overalls, the cornstalks up there. And I said, "You know, we've been trying to get out of this and put a little more normal face on country music than have them always make fun of us as being country rubes. So we were pretty sick when we finished the first show. And I said, "Roy, we got to do it but I wouldn't worry about it. I can't imagine this going anywhere. And I can't imagine anybody watching this."

Now what I didn't know and Roy didn't know was the secret was in the editing. When they put that together with those fast cuts, you know, a cut every ten seconds or five seconds, we were rolling on the floor ourselves. And about that time, we're still in Nashville, the Smothers Brothers had a show on CBS and because of some of their political views and comments CBS canceled. And they came in just while we're there and say, "Guys, we've got to do nine more shows."

"Nine more shows? How can we get it done?"

Well, they taped those shows in segments to where, I forget how long it took them to do those nine shows, it was like maybe three weeks, and then it's all in the editing. By then, we were convinced that it was going to be a hit because we had seen it. But before that I thought it was just going to be another country show, someone out there doing a song in overalls next to a bale of hay in a corn shot.

JE: So then that went on CBS?

JH: That went on CBS and it was just a runaway hit, it was the biggest thing that they'd had. It stayed on there for years. And between that and syndication it was on for like twenty-five years.

Now that just solidified a Roy Clark that was already a big star. And Roy, at that time, was still headlining major affairs and events and coliseums because of his records and the other television appearances.

Television is always the sales event that is just icing on the cake because you're seen by millions of people. Some of them will never buy your record, will never buy a ticket, but they know who you are.

Chapter 08 - 4:50**Elvis Presley**

John Erling: Of all the people that you've managed, is Roy Clark the most consummate performer, have everything going for him?

Jim Halsey: Well, he is the most consummate performer I've ever seen. Period. I was just fortunate enough that I was his manager for thirty-two years. But I've had four really elemental people in my life and each one of them enormous stars in their own right.

And of course, the first one was Hank Thompson. Not only was he a big star, we created a lot of firsts together for country music. Eventually, Hank sold sixty million records in his career time.

Then there was Wanda that opened a lot of doors for me, including the introduction to Roy Clark. Wanda, this year, was elected into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Hank was in the Country Music Hall of Fame. Roy Clark is in the Country Music Hall of Fame.

Now my longest and closest, besides Hank Thompson, of course, is the Oak Ridge Boys. Because we're like family and I've been managing them now for thirty-five years.

JE: By the way, just a little bit about Wanda Jackson. You met her, she was in high school.

JH: Right. She came down to be on Hank's television show.

JE: Okay.

JH: That was about the only thing she was doing professionally.

JE: So did you, the first time you heard her, say, "Bingo"?

JH: See, she had a distinctive voice, and one of the things that you look for as an artist manager is somebody that's going to be remembered. So if you turn on the radio and you hear six bars of somebody, you know that's Wanda Jackson. Or Hank Thompson. Or the Oak Ridge Boys. Or Roy Clark. They all have that distinctive vocal personality. Now if you see them on TV that just adds the picture to the voice.

So I knew that she was going to be, and, actually, I went into the army about that time.

JE: What year would that have been?

JH: In 1954. And I got in March of '56. In that time period, Wanda had graduated from high school and she was ready to start work. She had done some dates with Elvis, she opened for Elvis. So we got together in March of '56, we made our deal, and from then on we represented Wanda for about the next fourteen or fifteen years.

JE: Elvis Presley is also making his move in the world—

JH: Right.

JE: ... along about these same years. Did your paths cross? Did you—

JH: Well, I have a very interesting Elvis story. This is in 1954, I was in the army, but I still booked Hank all the way through the time. I never lost a minute of Hank Thompson business by

being in the army. I had booked him for six dates in Southern Louisiana and we needed an opening act.

So I was talking to Leo Zayblan at *DownBeat* in Chicago. I said, "I need an opening act to open for Hank in Louisiana."

And he said, "There's this kid that's tearing them up on the Louisiana Hayride. His name is Elvis Presley."

And I said, "Stop right there. I like the name, I don't care what he does, he's got a great name."

So I made a contact with him and Hank bought Elvis for six days for \$350 a day. And he opened for Hank on those six days. That was my first contact with Elvis Presley.

JE: And you went and saw him?

JH: No, I was in the army, I didn't see him.

JE: Oh, so you didn't get to see him.

JH: I didn't get to see him until—I went to see him when Wanda was opening for him. He was always very, very nice to me and Colonel Tom Parker was an old, old friend. I knew Colonel Tom Parker before Elvis Presley days because he managed Eddie Arnold and Hank Snow and he did a lot of work with Minnie Pearl.

Minnie Pearl was one of my longest, oldest, and dearest clients. I represented Minnie for twenty-five years. And I love Minnie.

JE: Did you tell her to keep the price tag in her hat?

JH: No, no. [both chuckling] She would do her show and Tom Parker would dress, kind of like Smiley Burnette. And when Minnie would get out doing her show, here would come this bumbling guy that looked like Smiley Burnette, down while the show's going on, while Minnie's going on, and he tries to get in a seat and he takes one aisle and then he goes to another aisle. And he's spilling popcorn all over everything. Well, that was Tom Parker. He thought that was funny, but Minnie didn't.

So Minnie told him one time after that show, she said, "Tom, if you ever come in and interrupt my show again like that, I'm going to take this hatpin out of my hat and run it straight through you." Something like that, you know.

JE: So you were friends with Colonel Tom Parker?

JH: Oh, yeah. Forever. I talked to him clear up until before he died. He would call me after all the Elvis stuff and everything and I had no idea why he would call. He would just call and we'd visit for maybe an hour.

Chapter 09 - 5:50**Oak Ridge Boys**

John Erling: If you had not met Hank Thompson, which set you on the country tour, was that your interest, country? Or could you have hooked up with someone else and you may have gone off on a different venue with them?

Jim Halsey: Well, I believe like Duke Ellington. Duke Ellington said, "There's two kinds of music: good and bad." I love all kinds of music. I would have been in music some way. It might have been with the big band, it might have been with a Woody Herman type of thing. But Hank and I had a meeting that was ordained, you might say. And we had a plan.

JE: Yeah.

JH: And everything that I did with Hank worked into other things as well.

JE: Let's pick up on the Oak Ridge Boys. Where do we first meet these four young lads?

JH: I met them a year before I met Minisa. I saw them at a showcasing in Nashville. This was in November 1974. Basically, they were solid gospel at that time. I'd heard that they were great and I stayed to see them and I didn't realize how great they were until I saw them. They were good looking guys and they dressed sharp. The furthest thing I thought from gospel music. They tore that audience up with gospel music.

And I went backstage, and I said, "You know, if you guys would ever consider expanding your repertoire and maybe include some pop and include some country music, I'd be interested in representing you."

They said, "Well, you know, there's not a lot of money in gospel music but we're the number one in the business."

I said, "I think you could do a hundred times more in country music."

And they thought it over and called me back in a couple of weeks and said, "We've been thinking about it. We're willing to make that try." It was a departure for them, and I had to be sure because I was taking these four guys and four families, feeding families and kids, bus payments, and all that on an unknown journey, but I knew that it would work.

So that was the beginning of it.

JE: Their name? How did they come by their name, Oak Ridge Boys?

JH: Well, that happens to be an old group. These aren't the original Oak Ridge Boys. The original Oak Ridge Boys go back to 1944 at Oak Ridge, Tennessee, when they were building the atomic bomb and had all that secret government business going on at Oak Ridge, Tennessee. And those people couldn't leave the compound, you know.

So they formed this quartet on the government base there to entertain the people. Wally Fowler was one of those first ones. There were a lot of Oak Ridge Boys. They first called it the Oak Ridge Quartet. They changed the name eventually to Oak Ridge Boys

and William Lee Golden was the first of what we know as the Oak Ridge Boys now, to come on and he's been on there for like forty years.

And then it was Duane Allen and then—

JE: How did they find each other to be a quartet?

JH: Well, because of the reputation that they had—

JE: Right.

JH: ... they all wanted to be an Oak Ridge Boy. So they'd call and would audition for them. The next to last one to come on was Joe Bonsall and then when they need a bass singer, Joe Bonsall knew of Richard in Camden, New Jersey, and called him.

JE: I remember watching them as they did Christian music. The Oak Ridge Boys had to take a lot of criticism from the Christian community.

JH: Totally.

JE: Tough life.

JH: After they made their change, one of the first places that I played them was in Las Vegas for one of Howard Hughes's hotels, the Landmark. I had a continuing show running there that I produced called "Country Music USA."

So I went to Walter Cane, who ran those six hotels for Howard Hughes and I said, "I want to headline these guys in our next show. They'll knock everybody out. Nobody knows who they are at this point, they will, but I've got to tell you, Mr. Cane, that about 30 percent will be gospel music."

Mr. Cane says, "We have Christians in the audience here too, you know." So he was a big supporter of mine.

The Oaks came in there and we had put their name up in lights, eight feet tall letters, so if you didn't know them you figured they must be big or they wouldn't have a marquee that big. We did real well. But the most important part was, I had three weeks of them setting down. The hotels were paid for, all the food was paid for, and we weren't running our buses. And they were making enough money to make payroll and send money home.

JE: Why did they feel they needed to keep the Christian music in there?

JH: First of all, they believe in it. And, you know, that's part of their heritage and we still do a number of gospels. We don't do a show without doing a gospel segment.

JE: Isn't it true that when you first met them, before a show you'd get together and have a prayer?

JH: Right. We'd all hold hands in a circle. We still do that today when it's an important event. We still do that today.

JE: So then the Oak Ridge Boys take off. They have a number of hits, don't they?

JH: They do. And surprisingly, the first hit they have, it was the furthest thing from gospel, it's called, "Y'all Come Back Saloon." Originally, they had a lot of trouble with their original

big gospel fans because they thought that they had left the field and were not believers anymore. Well, it couldn't be further from the truth. What they did was expand the audience some. There's not a show that they do today, anywhere, that they don't include a gospel segment in their performance.

JE: Joe Bonsall was the natural speaker for the group, wasn't he?

JH: Right. He's always so full of energy.

JE: There was a time when William Golden left the group.

JH: Right.

JE: And that was due to personality differences, I guess, is that true?

JH: Well, that and he had some thoughts about music and all of that. But he's back now and it's bigger and better than ever. And this is really the four guys that everybody know as the Oak Ridge Boys.

JE: Did you help the healing of that, of bringing him back?

JH: Well, I think that was a natural healing and everybody wanted it to happen. And they missed him and maintained contact so that wasn't a difficult thing.

Chapter 10 - 6:33

Client List

John Erling: In your book *Starmaker* you have twenty helpful suggestions. One of them is the Boy Scout motto: Be prepared. Give us an example of how you were prepared in Chicago.

Jim Halsey: This is when Roy won the Jukebox Operators of America award.

JE: And you were in the Grand Ballroom of Chicago's Conrad Hilton Hotel.

JH: Right. And of course, everybody was there, every big act at that time from Perry Como, I forget who all was there, but all the big stars. And they said, "We'll have a twenty-two-piece orchestra to play Roy's "Under the Double Eagle," and "Kansas City." Those are the two that played on the jukebox.

Roy was famous on the jukebox because everybody would always play an instrumental. So they loved Roy back in the days when the jukebox still were really big in buying records. We went up there and I thought, "This is going to be really great," and then I got an arranger to do two really fine arrangements. Roy has the main spot on the show, he's doing two numbers on the show there, you've got all these jukebox operators that buy thousands upon thousands in the audience, they're going to watch you.

So when it comes times for him to rehearse, they say, "Roy Clark, where's your conductor?" Well, Roy says, "Conductor?"

“Yeah, all these other acts bring their own conductors. These are Chicago’s finest musicians but they don’t have a conductor. Here you bring your own.”

Well, I didn’t know that. I’m still learning. But I had enough musical training from my old days when I was playing myself and I could read charts so I said, “That’s okay, Roy, I’ll do it.”

So I went out there and here, the power that you wield with that baton, I almost passed out. I picked that baton up and tapped it. Those musicians snapped to. I was in charge. So I conducted the orchestra with those two songs and I don’t think anybody knew the difference.

JE: [laughing]

JH: Except Roy and me.

JE: So when you were flailing your arms you were doing it to the beat of the music and they were playing?

JH: Well, I knew that—

JE: They were actually leading you.

JH: ... Yeah, well, I knew the song and I knew what it was supposed to be. So when it was time for the saxes I’d point to the saxes. I read the music, I knew what it was going to be.

JE: Your client list after the Oaks and Roy Clark, do you remember? There were so many of them.

JH: Oh, I remember all of them because they were all important to me from Ronnie Millsap, of course, Minnie Pearl is one that I love and Merle Haggard, Roy Orbison, Rick Nelson, on and on and on, everybody.

JE: People will ask you, “How do you become a star in the music business?” Must the star performer be able to be a writer too?

JH: It helps. Even if when you record your own material that’s not the hit, but that helps in the creative process. And I’ve found that people that create their own material always have a better interpretation of somebody else’s.

I have a quick story of which you probably read in the book about when these two young ladies came into our office and they wanted to have us as their agents. My receptionist said, “Well, leave a demo.”

They said, “What’s a demo?”

They said, “Well, that’s a representation of your music. You put it on tape or a CD.”

They said, “We don’t need that, we’ve got our guitars.” They went out and got their guitars, they were in the lobby of our office singing. They were good. And because they were a mother and a daughter it was unique. That was the Judds. So we represented the Judds for a long time.

And Reba, Reba is one of my favorite people that we represent because what a talented lady that she is, and a songwriter, and an actress.

- JE:** You talk about creating a hook in the song, like Oak Ridges Boys, “Oom pomp pah, oom pomp, pah.”
- JH:** Well, there’s not a hit song that doesn’t have a hook. That is the memorable phrase or like Tammy with “Stand By Your Man.” You know, there’s got to be something there that people remember. They’re not going to remember three minutes of music but they are going to remember that one memorable song, word, guitar lick, piano lick, whatever it is that sets that sound apart from the millions of others that are out there.
- JE:** Merle Haggard had a hook.
- JH:** Oh, he always had a hook.
- JE:** Okie from Muskogee.
- JH:** Right.
- JE:** Roy Orbison.
- JH:** Only the lonely. Roy Orbison was one of the most fascinating talents that I ever worked with. He was terrific.
- JE:** Crying, I mean, that tone to his voice.
- JH:** I know. He had a unique hook in his voice, but every song that he wrote too was unique in its structure of the melody and the word structure that he had.
- JE:** Leon Russell.
- JH:** Always with Leon, everything that he has has a hook. He was so great, people talk about the Tulsa sound, well, Leon *is* the Tulsa sound. He’s had all these years of all this great music that he’s written, composed. He’s just written some more songs with Elton John and Bernie Taupin and this new project that he’s recorded with T Bone Burnett.
- JE:** Also James Brown was a client of yours.
- JH:** Right.
- JE:** Godfather of soul.
- JH:** Right. I learned a lot from him, he was very important. He was very smart. All of these people I’ve dealt with are smart, they’re not just a performer on stage. They have an intelligence that gets them to where they’re going.
- When we first started working with Mr. James Brown, we did a lot of interviews and we did a lot of press conferences. And he said, “Mr. Halsey,” he said, “I will always call you Mr. Halsey when we’re in front of people. I would appreciate it if you would call me Mr. James Brown. Because it shows we have respect for each other.”
- And that’s true. I mean, if I had gone out there and said, “Well, Jim, this,” and “Jim, that,” and he said, “Well, Jim, this,” and “Jim, that,” it would have shown that maybe we didn’t have the proper respect for each other. So I always refer to him as Mr. James Brown. He was a great man.
- JE:** Exceptionally talented?

JH: Oh, exceptionally talented. He knew the audience and he knew how to reach an audience. He touched that audience, I don't care if it was five hundred or a thousand people or two hundred thousand people or a million and a half, like when he flew into Africa, there were a million and a half people on the runway as his 747 touched down.

JE: You've worked with some great songwriters.

JH: Well, Ronnie Dunn is one of the greatest, Brooks and Dunn? Tulsa lad. Wanda was a songwriter. Of course, Hank was the ultimate songwriter, he wrote almost everything that he did. Except he just recorded so many things that we eventually did some interesting pieces. He did one whole album of Mills Brothers' songs that was a big album. I think it was called "Cab Driver." Then he did one whole album of Nat Cole's songs.

Chapter 11 - 7:45

Halsey Ranch Party

John Erling: Millions of songs are written, maybe daily. So some young person who is listening to this and they say, "Man, I've got a great song," what do they do? Press it into the hands of somebody like you? Or how today does somebody get their song noticed?

Jim Halsey: Well, you still have to get somebody to listen to it. Somebody that can do something with it. It's easier today because you've internet and you've got Facebook and you can record in your basement or your garage and get a good recording of it and put it up on YouTube or put it somewhere where people will listen to it. But if you're a country music songwriter you still better go to Nashville and make the rounds of all of the record companies and music publishers.

And that stands for pop too. Because pop and country are kind of synonymous anymore.

JE: You made Freddy Fender a star.

JH: Well, Freddy Fender was a star. We just got people to find out about it. Because when he came to my attention was through Jim Foglesong, the president of Dot Records. He called me and he said, "I would like for you to sign this guy."

I said, "Fine, send me some stuff, I'll listen to it."

He said, "Well, we need it right away. He's got a new record out now and it's going to become number one in about three or four weeks." And he said, "Can you put him on anything?"

I was producing those shows in Las Vegas for the Howard Hughes's hotels called "Country Music USA." Same story as the Oak Ridge Boys. I said, "I could put him in to headline it but nobody knows who he is."

He said, "He'll be a star before he leaves there in three weeks. The record's going to hit."

That was Freddy Fender. And I didn't know Fred—I never signed anybody without doing extensive study and interview them and say, "What do you want to do? Where do you want to go with your career?" It's a two-way street, you just don't slap somebody on the back and say, "I'm going to make a star out of you."

But I took Freddy because of the recommendation of Jim Foglesong, one of my dear friends and a reputable man, for sure. So Freddy came in and I sent Leo Zayblan to the airport to pick him up. Leo calls me and says, "Jim, this guy, this guy has a pair of jeans and a T-shirt and he's got his guitar in a sack." He said, "You're headlining him tonight at the Landmark Hotel?"

I said, "Leo, you'd better go buy him some clothes."

So he did, Leo bought him a suit and Freddy came down there.

I put his name in big lights too, you know, all around the hotel and on the billboards coming in from the airport to the Las Vegas strip. So whether people knew him or not they figured he was a big star or he wouldn't have that kind of billing.

He came in there, he knocked those people out. He got on stage that night and he was a natural. He's a great guitar player and singer but a great entertainer. He would tell stories and they were funny stories. He became one of my favorite people. That song "Before the Next Teardrop Falls," which had been released a couple of weeks prior to that actually did go to number one before he closed there. And he was a big star when he left Las Vegas.

JE: Jim Foglesong was with Dot Records?

JH: He was president of Dot Records for a long time. And then with MCA when MCA bought Dot.

JE: Did he take on the Oak Ridge Boys immediately? Was that a tough sell?

JH: That was a tough sell and you talk about rejection, and he loved the Oak Ridge Boys. He said, "I just don't know that the transition, the change-over that you're talking about," he said, "I don't think it would work."

I said, "Those gospel people are so loyal and I don't think that the pop people will buy a gospel act." So he was a tough sell.

Now we used to do a thing here in Tulsa, Oklahoma, called the Halsey Ranch Party. It was a once-a-year deal where we would invite the biggest and the most important entertainment buyers in the world that would come in here. All the television people, Johnny Carson's people came in here. Freddy de Cordova who produced *Carson* for years came in every year. Entire state fair committees would come in. We would have twenty-five hundred to three thousand guests that would come to the Ranch Party, out south of Mounds, Oklahoma, south of Tulsa. We had big steers barbeque and we'd have art shows, we'd have Indian dancers there, we'd have all our performers performing in this natural amphitheater, Tammy Wynette, Freddy Fender, Jimmy Dean, Hank Thompson, Roy Clark, Mel Tillis, on and on, and the Oak Ridge Boys.

At that party one year, this was probably '75, '76, and I hadn't been able to convince Jim Foglesong, but when Jim saw the Oak Ridge Boys entertain that audience of pure Oklahomans and everybody else from all around the world there, about twenty-five hundred in our natural amphitheater there, he looked over and he said, "I'm convinced, let's make a deal."

We went in the ranch house and we made a deal and we started cutting records and a long important relationship that lasted for years and years.

JE: And the Oaks had what, twenty-seven number-one hits?

JH: Twenty-seven number-one hits. Right.

JE: Didn't you get your inspiration for the Halsey Ranch Party from what we here in Oklahoma know as the 101 Ranch?

JH: That and the old Phillips Petroleum guys, the brothers up in—

JE: Waite and Wiate Phillips and Frank Phillips.

JH: And Frank Phillips. And they'd have those big parties up there at their ranch and invite all of their eastern people, their brokers and their dealers and their bankers and everybody. And it was kind of like, "Bring people from New York out to wild and west Oklahoma." People had never seen—well, we did the same thing at the Ranch Party. We brought all these people from Los Angeles and New York and London that had never been to the West, the real West.

And we'd have them riding our horses. We'd have the barbeque, we'd have just a really good time out there.

JE: So it was a good way to sell your acts?

JH: Right.

JE: You got buyers, what you call buyers, people come in, tell them what a buyer is.

JH: Well, a buyer is the person that buys for the Kansas State Fair or the New Mexico State Fair or the Nebraska State Fair or the buyer that buys entertainment for all the hotels and casinos in Las Vegas or Reno, at that time were the only two places that had gambling. A buyer is the entertainment buyer that purchases what you have to sell.

Now when we invited people there it wasn't one of those things to where we say, "We're going to showcase out here some acts you need to have." There was nothing ever said about selling. Those people would say to us, we had all of our agents on the grounds, they would say to us, "Wow, you know, I'd love to have Merle Haggard for my fair next year." Or "I'd love to Mel Tillis headline the casino."

So it was very subliminal but we sold millions upon millions upon millions of dollars' worth of entertainment in the two-day time period.

JE: Was it an association with the Ranch Party that Roy Clark would have his celebrity golf tournament?

JH: We do that the same weekend because a lot of the same people would come in. Now we would never showcase to any of the people that were on the celebrity golf tournament show unless they were ours, because we would bring in, you know, from Bob Hope to Woody Herman and people like that that were there. You couldn't showcase at the Ranch Party unless you were part of the Halsey Company roster.

JE: The celebrity golf tournament in Tulsa became a very big tournament and a big event for the city.

JH: It—big event in we raised a lot of money for the Children's Medical Center.

JE: Yeah. Roy Clark often substituted for Johnny Carson when Johnny was away.

JH: He was the first country act to ever substitute for Johnny Carson. After Roy did it several did it, but Roy was the very first country music artist to ever substitute for Johnny Carson. And then there would be periods where he'd do it for a week at a time.

JE: Yeah, which was really strong back then.

JH: Right.

JE: It showed what a rounded personality he was.

JH: Right.

JE: Did you ever get around Johnny Carson?

JH: Well, we were there every time Roy did the show. The Oak Ridge Boys have done the show twenty-seven times. Probably Roy's done it close to a hundred. He had Freddy Fender, he had Mel Tillis.

Chapter 12 - 7:30

Soviet Union

John Erling: In '76, Roy Clark and the Oaks take on a little trip.

Jim Halsey: Right. That was our exhibition trip to the Soviet Union where they'd never had a country music performer before. And we went under the auspices of the State Department's Cultural Exchange Program. It took two years to put that together. And it was a fabulous success. We played there in nineteen sold-out concerts, we were there for twenty-one days, and a lot of people said that we did more good for the relationship between the two countries than anything else that had ever happened.

JE: I'm taken with your statement, "It took two years." People think that some of this stuff just happens overnight.

JH: Yeah, almost everything takes time.

JE: In that two-year period there probably had to be times when you thought, "You know what? I wonder if this is even going to make it."

JH: Well, that's true. And sometimes you get close to making it work and there would be some diplomatic relationship that would go wrong or some incident of some type. And then everything would come to a halt and you kind of had to start all over again.

JE: When you finally got there and the first time you knew these people were hearing country music for the first time, that had to be that gnawing in your brain, saying, "Boy, I'm wondering, is this going to go over or not?" Or did you feel confident?

JH: Well, we felt confident that it would. First of all, with Roy and with the Oak Ridge Boys, this might not have happened with any other act, Roy Clark can entertain anybody, anytime, anywhere, no problem at all there.

The Oak Ridge Boys, because of their harmony, people love vocal harmony. We knew that the Russians did because they have those great choirs and they've got all those big basso singers and everything. So I wasn't so concerned about that. I was more concerned about the political aspects of how we would be received and whether the people would really get to be able to enjoy us and express it, which they did.

But it took two years to put it together because they sent three delegations, the Soviets did, to make sure that this would all work and there was no hidden agendas that any of us had about maybe being political in event.

JE: Soviet officials came and saw their live shows?

JH: Three, three different locations, right.

JE: And realized, "Well, there's nothing political about this."

JH: No, they asked us to take out all the gospel things and anything that referred to Jesus. But the guys closed the show with "Have a Little Talk with Jesus" and everybody loved it, so ...

JE: How many weeks were the guys able to perform over there?

JH: We did nineteen days of performance in twenty-one days. We were there for three weeks.

JE: And then an invite to come back again?

JH: Right. That took another long period of time. So we were there in '76, the next tour was in 1988.

JE: Did they have venues that were good?

JH: Oh, yeah, but we mainly played sports venues. We played one theater, the Rossiya Theatre in Moscow, which was a large theater. It seated six thousand people, and that was like for a regular concert. The rest of them were all sports venues that would seat eighteen to twenty thousand people. Those things are never as good as if you're sitting in a theater watching the show.

JE: You did so many firsts, I mean, to think that I'm going to bring country music to Soviet Union. I'm going to bring a country performer to Carnegie Hall.

JH: And Radio City Music.

JE: Yes.

JH: And Royal Albert Hall in London.

JE: A lot of people had to put you down or say, "Come on." Why, for instance, Carnegie Hall?

JH: If you're good enough to play Carnegie Hall, you're good enough to play anywhere. We actually lost money playing Carnegie Hall, we were sold out, but you go in there, it's the prestige. There's some things you do that money's not connected with. So not only did the guys work for nothing when we played Carnegie Hall, we had to be funded as well too. Because you sell some place out and you're still in the hole?

I went to a gentleman that had a number of venues besides New York, James Nederlander. They're one of the big landholders in New York. They probably own twelve theaters up there. But they also own theaters in Phoenix and Detroit. They call them sheds, you know, because they're half outdoors. I asked him if he wanted to cosponsor this with me. I said, "It's going to cost a little money but we'll have some fun doing it and we'll get a lot of press and publicity out of it."

So he did. The poster says, "James H. Nederlander and Jim Halsey." To me, that was like having Sol Hurok up there with my name. Mr. Nederlander, and he's still alive today and he lives in Phoenix. But we did that show and we not only recorded it for an album but it was the first time that it had ever been recorded for an album and broadcast at the same time. Plus it was just a natural event.

We did that on a number of 50,000 watt stations including KVOO, at that time in Tulsa, WBAP in Ft. Worth, and KWKH in Shreveport. We had, I think, twenty stations that broadcast that live performance.

JE: Who were the acts in that?

JH: That one was Hank Thompson, Roy Clark, Freddy Fender, and Don Williams. All Dot Records, because we had to have all one record company to help us pay for this thing.

JE: I may be wrong in my thinking here, but while you're doing all these things for country, we have Nashville over here and I don't know if you were operating from Nashville at all.

JH: No, we operated from Tulsa. Tulsa was our headquarters.

JE: Okay, right. So are there Nashville people saying, "What is this Jim Halsey doing?" Did any of that stuff go on?

JH: Yes it did. And a lot of that happened more after our Ranch Parties. Because we would have those Ranch Parties at the end of September. And the big fair meeting where all the fairs in America get together in Las Vegas was always the end of November. Well, most of those fair buyers, by the time they got to the fair-buying meeting in November, had already been to our Ranch Party and bought a Halsey Company act.

So out of that came an event that they put together in Nashville that happens in October. And it's still now and it kind of turns into the CMA week and the CMA broadcast, which they broadcast on television.

But I didn't do thinking about any of that, I thought about only my artists. My main responsibilities were to the artists that I represented. So I didn't think about competition, I didn't think about somebody else doing something else. I only stayed focused on what I was doing.

You start worrying too much about what that other guy is doing and you lose focus on what you're doing yourself.

JE: The Grand Ole Opry had been going on, what, in the '20s?

JH: Yeah, it still is. It's still successful and I have the Oak Ridge Boys appear on it and Roy appears on it a lot too. It's apples and oranges. We're not in the same business that they were.

JE: Explain that to me.

JH: We were in a very sophisticated sales and marketing approach to selling our acts. They just happened to be country music artists.

JE: So there is a distinct difference there.

JH: Right.

JE: So it's interesting you didn't feel you needed to go to the Grand Ole Opry and be associated with them to do your thing. You went on your own. But—

JH: Well, but their friends of mine and I've been on that board of the Country Music Association a number of years. It's just I was doing something different than they were.

JE: And you were accepted by them? Maybe others began to say, "You know what? This Halsey guy out in Oklahoma is doing something. We ought to pay attention to him."

JH: Well, I don't know, maybe they did. I didn't even think about that. I thought about what we were doing with our artists.

Chapter 13 - 6:23

Branson, Missouri

John Erling: When you break records on the radio there are monitoring stations that do that for you.

Jim Halsey: Right.

JE: What are monitoring stations?

JH: Monitoring stations are stations that are monitored primarily by the Neilson group, which is *Billboard* magazine. In country music there are 112 stations across America that they called monitored stations. If your song, your record is not being played on any of those stations, you're not going to see any chart action. I don't care if the twenty-eight hundred other radio stations are playing it twelve times a day.

They have another hundred stations below that called the breakthrough stations. If you get on that, that means that maybe if you do well there, you might get on the monitored stations. It cost a lot of money to get a record in the top ten. If it goes to number one you've probably spent maybe a million dollars.

JE: How do they track that so you get your money?

JH: You get your money by the sales of the records.

JE: Yeah.

JH: You don't get paid anything on the radio.

JE: Did you always trust that sales of records? How do I trust these numbers?

JH: Well, that's another program.

JE: [laughing] All right, all right. Branson, Missouri, and there's a great story there. The Oaks and Roy Clark became part of that community.

JH: Well, Roy was the very first big-name artist to go over there and build his own theater, and started this whole thing of other theaters with other artists that came in. Eventually, Mel Tillis, Ray Stevens, the Osmonds and everybody came in and built. But Roy was the very first one.

Before that it was Steve Presley, the Presley Family, who have been there forever, and the Baldknobbers. The two still going strong every night of the week, country music, comedy, playing, dancing, singing, fiddling, banjo, and stuff. It's a rounded out show.

Roy brought a different type of show and he brought a regular country music show. There is, I think, sixty theaters now in Branson. Most of them are anywhere from fifteen hundred to three thousand. The Oak Ridge Boys have been part of the community there for, yeah, they played a date at Presley's Theatre probably twenty-five years ago, you know.

But the last few years, the last fifteen to twenty years, we've been playing the main theaters there. We played the Palace, the Grand Palace, and they closed. And now we have our own theater there. A gentleman by the name of Gene Bicknell has a number of theaters. He owns the Mansion Theatre and he owns the Oak Ridge Boys Theatre, which is called the Oak Ridge Boys Theatre but it's owned by this group of people.

JE: So is your managing still part of what they do there? I guess it is.

JH: Oh, yeah, sure. And we try to design special events and programs. Last year we did three weddings on stage. We had a Walk for Health where we walked from the theater down to the Branson Landing. So every time we're in there we try to have some event that goes on.

We're there twenty-seven days this year, 2010. At nine different times.

JE: Where do the Oak Ridge Boys live?

JH: They live in Hendersonville, Tennessee, which is a suburb of Nashville.

JE: So all four of them, families live in that area.

JH: All four of them. Yeah, and within pretty close proximity of each other.

JE: Are they back and forth a lot together when they're not singing?

JH: There's certain things that they do together, their families do together, but the guys are on the road—

JE: Yeah.

JH: ... a hundred and fifty days a year, so they're with each other on that bus. And even the funny thing on the bus is they're all, you know, Blackberry, and iPods. So a lot of time, instead of even carrying on conversations on the bus, they're texting each other back and forth. "Where are we going to stop for lunch?" Or "How far to the next town?" whatever it is.

JE: I was talking about rejection earlier but there's a story we'll call the Bob Freed story, Salt Lake City.

JH: Okay.

JE: And the lagoon.

JH: Well, the Bob Freed story can just go over and over and over. My book, the *Starmaker* book, which is really a chronicle of how you can make it in the music business. John Wooley helped me put that together and is published by Tate Publishing Company. But in talking about things about rejection and talking about constant promotion, layered marketing, and whatever it is that we say is important to build your career, I illustrate a lot of this with just stories that have happened to me.

Well, one of the places in my early days with Hank Thompson was always to try to play places where country music had never been before. The Lagoon Ballroom in Salt Lake City was one of those places that I knew of because it played all the big bands, Lionel Hampton, Woody Herman, Count Basie, and all that.

I found out the operator's name was a guy by the name of Bob Freed. And I would write him and send him information and things and he would very politely say, you know, "We don't use country music here and we never have and don't intend to."

Well, I just don't take no for an answer. So every time that Hank would have a number one record in the billboard charts I would circle it and send it to him. Then I would send him a new record and I would send him a story out of a paper, whatever it was, you know, "Good review on Hank Thompson," maybe it was a theater.

Finally, he wrote me a letter and said, "I'm going to buy Hank Thompson and his band on the date you suggested. But I'm so sick and tired of getting your sales pitches on me that once this is played and I've lost a lot of money I want you to forever take me out of your Rolodex."

Well, needless to say, it was a big success. We just had people hanging out the windows, you know. We became good friends after that. And laughed about that situation many times.

He said, "I really bought that date just to get rid of you." He said, "You were so persistent I knew that I wasn't ever going to shut you up unless I bought Hank Thompson."

He said, "Fortunately, it turned into a great success and you and I have become good friends. I play Hank in here once a year."

So your noes, you've got to turn around and make them a yes.

JE: Persistence, persistence, something else we call sweet persistence.

JH: But it's more challenging to me to go after somebody that you know is not going to buy you then it is somebody you know wants what you have and all you have to do is call and negotiate the deal. It's a lot more interesting to make an interesting point and make a sale.

JE: You enjoy that challenge?

JH: Oh, I do, yeah, that's part, I think, of any salesperson. Instead of buying the Chevrolet you're going to be buying a Cadillac—

JE: Yeah.

JH: ... or that's what they're going to try to sell you.

Chapter 14 - 8:00

Jones and Wynette

John Erling: You have clients George Jones and Tammy Wynette?

Jim Halsey: Right.

JE: That was an interesting story because the two of them separated and did you bring them back together?

JH: Right. I didn't represent George at that time, I represented Tammy Wynette and we booked her all over everything. And George has straightened his life out there was some conversation about maybe the possibility of getting the two of them together again for a tour.

Now Tammy was remarried to a guy by the name of George Richey, who was a good producer and a good friend of ours. And it was his brother that actually negotiated the two of them to say that they would tour together. The Halsey Company represented that tour. We made a big splash: George and Tammy together again. First time in ten years (whatever it was). Only available here.

We picked the best PACs, the best places to play, we did about thirty days and it was a sensational tour. Got a lot of press. Back together they recorded a record again, it was just one of the best shows in country music out there at that time.

Mr. Jones, George, was so impressed with the thoroughness of our Halsey Booking Company he said, "I'd like for you to represent me." And of course, he straightened his life out and was just right on the ball there.

So we signed a three-year contract with him to represent George Jones. You know, one of the legends in country music.

Well, we started a tour with him. And he missed the first thirty days. Some places he was even there in the bus and didn't get out of the bus. I don't know what had happened, but some traumatic change in his life had caused him to change his style of living at that time.

So it became expensive for us to follow that around because every time he would miss a date in Wichita or Kansas City we'd get a lawsuit against the company the next day.

Now we clearly stated in our contract that we were not libel and functioned merely as an agent but when they sue you, then you have to hire a lawyer in Kansas City to go in and get your case dismissed. So I had thirty dates out there that we had booked and thirty lawsuits and each one of them we got dismissed. But it cost a thousand to fifteen hundred dollars legal fee in each. So at the end of thirty days I had like thirty, forty thousand dollars out the window.

So I wrote him this nice letter and told him, I said, "We appreciate and respect your artistry and that and wish you best." But I sent him his three-year contract back. "George Jones," I said, "we can't afford to continue."

And that was fine. Then about a year and a half after that, I ran into him at the Grand Ole Opry. And I was just backstage visiting with him and he said, "Say, Halsey," he said, "I want to talk to you." He said, "Those agents of yours are just booking me too far. I can't make those kind of jumps."

And I said, "Well, Mr. Jones, we haven't represented you a year and a half."

Now since that time, I am so happy to say that he has remarried. This has been the last ten, twelve years. And his new wife, Nancy, has really, they've got him on a good track and he's a responsible person that has made all of his dates and satisfied the customers and the fans alike. And he's doing really good. And I see him from time to time.

When he was here in Tulsa I spent about an hour on the bus just visiting with him. And I have the greatest respect for George Jones.

JE: Everyone must pitch a song to you. They know that you can make it happen if it's right. Even some young people who maybe became a big name. I'm referring to the Hansons.

JH: Well, I had already sold my agency to William Morris, the William Morris Company. And I was doing a series of lectures. And this has been about, I don't know, twelve, fifteen years ago. And I did one here in Tulsa at the Sheraton. And I'm telling everybody in the audience there, "You know, you've just got to be persistent, you've got to get your foot in the door. Don't be afraid to make a phone call." I said, "Don't be afraid to take rejection, because if you don't make the call you're never going to get in the door."

So the next morning I was awakened at seven o'clock and it was a gentleman identifying himself as Walter Hanson. He said, "I have these three young sons that are

terrific musicians and they're writing songs and they're good." And said, "I'd like for you to hear them."

And I said, "Well, fine, send me a demo and I'll be happy to."

He said, "No, they're in the lobby of the hotel right now, performing here." He said, "I paid fifty dollars to hear you talk last night and you said, 'Don't give up, get your foot in the door, don't be afraid to make the phone call.'" And he said, "That's what I'm doing, I'm making a phone call."

Well, what else could I do? I had to get up then, and I went down and those kids were terrific. I mean, it's fifteen years ago, those kids were terrific. I told him, I said, "You know, I'm not doing this anymore." I said, "I've got the Oak Ridge Boys but that's the only thing I'm doing. But these kids are so good I want to put you in touch with my attorney in Los Angeles, a gentleman by the name of Bill Coben," who still represented us and had for our company, "because I think that they have the possibility of being big stars."

So they did contact Bill Coben and Bill Coben worked and he got them their manager, helped get them the record deal and then the rest is history. Those kids went on.

But Bill Coben remained their attorney up until just a couple of years ago when he retired.

JE: So you did spot something obviously in them immediately?

JH: Oh, they were great, yeah. If I'd still had my agency I would have signed them in a minute.

JE: Did you ever think you spotted somebody and they fizzled?

JH: Yeah, a number of times. Some of them just imploded themselves as well. Sure, it doesn't always work. What you are reading about that book and what you're seeing and hearing about me are all the successes that I've had.

JE: Right.

JH: Now I wouldn't have had all those successes if I hadn't had a lot of failures too. I encourage everybody to fail. If you never fail you're never going to have a success.

JE: Because there's learning that comes from—

JH: There's learning and you've got to get right up and go after it, maybe you change your position a little bit, maybe you do something else. But there's nothing wrong with failing.

JE: So then there were performers that you thought, "Man, these guys are going to be hot."

JH: Oh, absolutely, yeah.

JE: And they just went down the tube.

JH: Right.

JE: Just did not work at all.

JH: Right.

JE: Maybe they did have the talent but they didn't have the character or whatever to pull it off?

JH: There are a lot of different circumstances. And sometimes you can fail just as easily by being ahead of the times as you can by being behind the times.

JE: Did you ever miss out on some talent because you misjudged them and you thought they're not going to make it?

JH: No, but I miss talent. I know Vince Gill told me one time, he said, "Man, I wanted to sign with your agency so bad, but," he said, "I could never get past the receptionist."

And I said, "You know, I would have loved to have represented you and I don't understand that."

Our receptionists were told that everybody is a potential star whether you know them or not. And we looked at everybody. So I don't know whether he got somebody that was on the desk during a sick time or what, but we never connected. But I have a lot of respect for Vince Gill, he's one of the great talents.

JE: But as tenacious as you were he probably should have been more tenacious than letting the receptionist block him.

JH: You never know, you know, with things like that.

JE: Right, right, right. What about Garth Brooks?

JH: Well, Garth Brooks is an exceptional talent and one of the great Oklahoma pride people. I might not have had a shot at him anyway, but if I had of I certainly would have recognized him. Because he's my type act. He's a spectacular act. He's a Roy Clark type of performer where he does everything and he does it from one side of the stage to the other to hanging by the rafters.

JE: I don't need to dwell on this but did you try to secure him as a client?

JH: No, I'd already sold our company.

JE: Okay.

JH: The only thing I was involved with was the Oak Ridge Boys at that time.

Chapter 15 - 9:26

Follow Your Dreams

John Erling: The Halsey Company, your company for what you did, was the biggest in the world.

Jim Halsey: Right.

JE: What led to the selling of the company?

JH: Well, I just wanted to do something else. And I wanted to get into teaching, because we were holding classes twice a week at our office in our conference room. I felt there's so many people that if they just had a little knowledge could be successful faster. Well, faster if they read the book. Faster if they take a course. And we were doing that. And I thought—so I took a program to Oklahoma City University, a degree program about the music

and entertainment business. And I was there from 1994 to 2000. It was one of the most successful programs at the university.

JE: You know, that's real honorable of you that you wanted to pass on all the information that you had gained by hard knocks and failure and make it easier for somebody else.

JH: Well, I've had so many mentors in my life, I had a lot of one-on-one training from the best in the business.

JE: Let me go back, the Beatles, did you ever cross roads?

JH: I did. Sid Bernstein. who brought the Beatles to Shea Stadium their first American performance, was a friend of mine because he was a promoter and he promoted Hank Thompson in those early days.

I took a year out of my life in 1966 and went to the General Artists Corporation as a senior vice president there. I still maintained the Halsey Company and I had Roy Clark and Hank Thompson and Wanda Jackson and my whole group of people. And at that time, I tried to get them involved because I knew the explosion of what country music was going to be.

Finally, Buddy Howell, who was president of the company, said, "Jim, we can't find anybody. Why don't you come and do it for us?"

So I did it for a year. We represented the Beatles, represented Bob Hope, represented Jackie Gleason and that's where I met the Beatles.

I never was involved personally with the Beatles but the company, General Artists Corporation, was another one of my greatest learning experiences of my entire life. I was there for a year in Beverly Hills and I was in with all of the top executives in entertainment. And Martin Baum, who founded CAA, I learned so much during that year, it was the greatest learning year I ever had.

At the end of the year, I brought them Glen Campbell. Then I said, "I've got to go out on my own again, it's just too confining to be in that big corporate structure."

JE: I'm sure you follow Oklahoma's own *American Idol* winner Carrie Underwood.

JH: Oh, she's so great, yeah.

JE: What are your thoughts today about country music?

JH: Well, it's the pop music of today. And while the record companies are only interested in those monitoring stations that *Billboard* does people like the Oak Ridge Boys and Merle Haggard and Roy Clark and all those still have an enormous career out there because there's still twenty-eight hundred radio stations that are playing them that *people* listen to but they're not in the *Billboard* charts that regulates where all the money is spent.

Carrie Underwood, I think, is one of those phenomenal singers but she's as much pop as country. If you just heard her and didn't know her history you'd say, "That's a pop singer."

Same way with Faith Hill and a lot of others. I love country music and I love all kinds of music, but there are a number of different styles of country music.

JE: You referred to your book *Starmaker: How to Make It in the Music Business*, Jim Halsey with John Wooly. Introduction by Joe Bonsall. In it you have the secrets of the Jim Halsey Company. Are there some secrets here that you can share with us?

JH: Well, I think that you have to buy the book, John, to ... but the real secret is within yourself, each and every person that you find where you want to go. And this book will tell you because each person is different. This book will give you a number of formulas to follow on how you can find what your success is going to be.

JE: What in your career are you the most proud of?

JH: Well, I am an event person so I'm proud of the events that our company created. Now I get a lot of the credit for all of these things but you've got to realize I had a big company with a lot of people that followed our direction and followed our philosophy.

But the Soviet tour, I think was one of the things that changed my life a lot. And the Las Vegas area of where we were able to do, for the first time anybody has ever done it, every major hotel in Las Vegas theater, had a Halsey act. One to three acts in it, all at the same time. And that happened during the fair buyers meetings.

So when you came into town, if you were a fair buyer, after you'd been to the Halsey Ranch Party and you go to Las Vegas and there's not a hotel or showroom in that town that's not featuring your act.

Joe Delaney of the *Las Vegas Sun* said that we deserved a place in the *Guinness Book of Records*. Nobody has ever repeated that.

I just have had a wonderful life dealing with a lot of wonderful people and I still am. I think the thing that I'm most proud of is the fact that I was just been able to be involved with so many talented people. And that includes my wife, Minisa.

JE: Your advice to students, because I always ask that, this is already dedicated to students, this website, in addition to buying your book, of course?

JH: I can boil it down in two words, it's all about sales and marketing. And there are so many innovative ways that you can sell and market your product now or your music or your band. Naturally, I think my book does it because we talk about music and entertainment. But there are probably five hundred good books on marketing and selling products out there. And that's where you learn, learn from the best.

Go to Barnes and Nobles or Borders or Amazon and get a lot of those books.

JE: You early on embraced the internet and what it can do for you and websites and Facebook and all that kind of thing. You know, you probably could have thought, "Man, I wish I had that back in the '60s."

JH: Well, I always believed in a picture, picture with the music of the word. So we were one of the first to really utilize the ability of selling through television. Part of that comes from the fact that we experienced it and nobody else believed. I couldn't believe people would

criticize me for flying Roy Clark to the West Coast to appear on the *Johnny Carson Show* where he got paid \$365.

They said, "I can't believe you'd do that to your artist."

I said, "Well, maybe I shouldn't do it." I wasn't going to tell him that the next day we probably sold millions of dollars' worth of Roy Clark dates just because he was on for \$365 the night before.

JE: Yeah, and there's another case where you intuitively got it but you're probably surprised, "Why didn't those guys get it too?"

JH: Well, I wasn't going to encourage them to.

JE: Is there any story, any comment, anything else that you would like to say?

JH: Yeah, I would like to encourage all young people that have any hope at all of getting their music heard, their songs listened to, and them being on stage that there is an opportunity for you out there. And you have to stay with it.

The words that I got a long time ago still apply today: Follow your dreams. Because when you stop following your dreams you're going to stop having them.

JE: Very good. Well, thank you, Jim, for this time you've given to us. This is valuable and kids fifty years from now will be able to listen to this.

JH: Right.

JE: I appreciate it greatly.

JH: John, I appreciate it. Thank you very much for you taking the time to do this. And, you know, the exhibition that is at the Oklahoma History Center in Oklahoma City now kind of reflects on the sixty years of all these different artists that we've been involved with. But to me it's not about the past. I'm hoping that that's going to be maybe an inspiration for young people to think about their future.

I'm still thinking about my future, that's where it is with me.

JE: So here you are, seventy-nine years old, April 2010, what does Jim Halsey do today? What are his dreams today?

JH: My dreams are still more in the educational line. I'm going to put up online our Halsey Institute where you'll be able to take my courses online for credit or not credit if you don't want to, about the music and entertainment business. And we have an introduction into music and entertainment. We have creative artist management. We have booking and talent. We have press and PR. We have songwriting, promotion of events. We'll have in the next six months about six different courses that you can take online anywhere in the world, wherever you live, you can take them.

JE: So this young lad from Independence, Kansas, didn't know that he was going to end up being a college professor, did he?

JH: No, I didn't, but I'm enjoying it.

JE: Right.

JH: I'm still enjoying my time with the Oak Ridge Boys. I still visit with a lot of the artists. I visit with Roy all the time and see Wanda. And the Oak Ridge Boys are like family to us. We've been together for so long that it's still exciting to create new and different and challenging things for them every single year.

JE: You're the fifth member of the quartet, right?

JH: Yeah, maybe so, yeah. Thanks a lot, John, I appreciate it.

JE: All right. Thank you, this is wonderful.

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.

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