

## Chapter 01 – Introduction

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**Announcer:** For those who remember the television show “Shindig!” but may have forgotten the host, this story will remind you of the very talented Jimmy O’Neill, who was from Enid, Oklahoma.

He started his radio career at 16 in Enid, then on to WKY Oklahoma City and KQV Pittsburgh before making his Los Angeles debut at the brand-new KRLA in 1960. The station had just adopted a top-40 format. At the age of 20, Jimmy O’Neill had the most popular program in his time slot, making him the youngest person ever to have a No. 1 show.

Jimmy was 24 when he hosted “Shindig!” which was on ABC television from September 1964 to January 1966 and for a time ran twice a week. Besides the Beatles, among its list of superstars, “Shindig!” featured the Who, the Rolling Stones, Sam Cooke, the Beach Boys, and the Righteous Brothers. Jimmy was also the owner of Pandora’s Box, an influential Sunset Strip music venue in West Hollywood, California.

Jimmy eventually left Los Angeles for KOB in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and then WOW, Omaha, Nebraska, where John Erling worked with him at WOW and KOIL.

Jimmy was 73 when he died January 11th, 2013. For Jimmy’s story, John interviewed Jimmy’s former wife Eve O’Neil, whose brother was actor Troy Donahue.

If you search the web for Jimmy O’Neill, you’ll find examples of his extraordinary work. Listen to the Jimmy O’Neill story on the oral history website and podcast Voices of Oklahoma.com.

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**Chapter 02 – 12:09**  
**Troy Donahue**

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**John Erling (JE):** Today's date is April 8th, 2021. So, Eve, would you give us your full name, please?

**Eve Johnson O'Neill (EJ):** Eve Syria Johnson O'Neill.

**JE:** Johnson – Are you Scandinavian, Norwegian or Swedish?

**EJ:** Swedish, and throw in on my – that was on my mother's side, the Fredricksons – the Johnsons are German and English and there's a little bit of French in there too.

**JE:** Oh, okay. And I am recording this from my office and studio in Tulsa, Oklahoma. And where are you as we record this?

**EJ:** I'm in Oxnard, California, which has been in Ventura County about 20 miles north of Malibu on the coast.

**JE:** So I recently discovered a book titled Voices On The Wind: Early Radio in Oklahoma by Jean Allen. And on page 96, there's a photo of Jimmy O'Neill and it's at a KGWA live broadcast of the 1958 home show in Enid's convention hall. And the caption says that the DJ, Jimmy O'Neill – a high school student at the time – went on to work at WKY in Oklahoma City and stations in Pittsburgh and Los Angeles before becoming the emcee of TV's Shindig. Well, it turns out he was born and raised in Enid. And I worked with him in Omaha, Nebraska. And while I may have known he came from Oklahoma, I really hadn't pursued that fact until I read this book.

Now, Jimmy died January 11, 2013 – and he was 73. So, Eve, you and I are going to tell the story of a very talented radio personality and how he got his start in his hometown of Enid.

So Eve, as they say in the interest of full disclosure, Jimmy is your former husband.

**EJ:** Mhm.

**JE:** And I worked with Jimmy in Omaha for several years. I was in Omaha from '70, '71 until 1976. So somewhere in there, Jimmy came to Omaha and I worked with him at WOW and KOIL. He was a colleague but also became a friend. And so with that aside, it will give some insights that perhaps others may not have.

But a bit about you. Where were you born?

**EJ:** I was born in New York.

**JE:** You were born in New York, and then you grew up in New York?

**EJ:** Actually, I grew up on Long Island about 50, 60 miles from Manhattan and it was on the south shore of Manhattan – very bucolic, lovely area, very flat, lots of farms.

**JE:** And your parents, who were they?

**EJ:** My father was a film producer who was working for General Motors in public relations and he would film training films and documentaries on behalf of General Motors. And my mother had been a model and an actress who retired and raised my brother and me.

**JE:** Alright. And their names – your mother and father's names?

**EJ:** My father was Merle – Frederick Merle Johnson and my mother was Edith Dorothy Frederickson Johnson.

**JE:** Alright. And then how many siblings did you have?

**EJ:** One sibling. My brother, Boy, who later became Troy.

**JE:** And your brother's name was Merle?

**EJ:** Yes, it was Merle. But nobody ever called him Merle, we all called him Boy because he was entranced with the – Tarzan's son named Boy. So we went from Boy to Troy, it was very easy.

**JE:** His name then was Merle Johnson, so we haven't said Troy's name. What was his stage name?

**EJ:** Troy Donahue.

**JE:** And so we're going to hear names during this interview that we could go down those paths a long way. But we don't have time to do that. But tell us a little bit about your brother Troy. What did he do? Who was he?

**EJ:** Okay. Well, my brother was nine years older than I was. So, he was always the most popular boy in school when it came to the girls. And we lived in a small [candy] – high school and elementary were all in one building.

And girls used to come and find me at lunchtime and they would give me candy and all kinds of chips and things to get me to talk about my brother. They would ask me questions: "Who did your brother talk to on the phone last night?" You know, "What, what – who is he dating? Who does he talk about?"

And I remember one day looking at a magazine that was unlike any magazine I have ever seen in our house before, which was mostly Town & Country and New Yorker magazines, like that. Well, this was an early copy of a movie magazine and they had Marilyn Monroe in it and somebody explained to me that these were movie stars who were adored by lots of people and were in movies. And so I looked at my brother and I said, "You're going to be a movie star someday." And everyone laughed and that was it.

**JE:** Right. Right.

**EJ:** I'm a little prophetic.

**JE:** Yes. Very – very prophetic. And then we'll jump ahead because there's so much we could talk about Troy. But one evening, I understand, he was

spotted at a diner in Malibu by a producer and director and arranged for a screen test and it was – and it was unsuccessful at that time. But-

**EJ:** Well, the reason it was unsuccessful was the day of the screen test – the night before he was coming back from the bar with a friend and he drove a little red MG Classic off a cliff on the Malibu country road – Malibu Canyon road.

And they had to pull him out and take him to the hospital. And so he missed his screen test, but he was okay. He recovered from that.

**JE:** So then we jump way ahead and he got his big break when he was cast opposite Sandra Dee in *A Summer Place*. And then he was in the Western TV series such as *Colt 45*, *Maverick*, *Sugarfoot*. And he was going to be cast in *Splendor in the Grass*, I see, but missed out to Warren Beatty.

**EJ:** Right. And that's the reason my brother walked out on his contract with Warner Brothers. If they had him in one sudsy movie after another and he didn't want to do any TV – they forced him into that. And Jack Warner himself had promised Troy a part – the lead part in *Splendor in the Grass* opposite Natalie Wood.

Well, Natalie Wood started dating Warren Beatty and she wanted to do a film with him. And so my brother missed out on working with director Elia Kazan – very wonderful director who would have taught Troy a lot. And Troy was so furious with Jack Warner that he walked off Warner Brothers' lot and never went back.

**JE:** But I understand that Warner Brothers actually put him in a TV series which really catapulted him in the minds of Americans. He was in *Surfside Six*, which was one of several spinoffs of *77 Sunset Strip*. And then he was also – another one was *Hawaiian Eye* and that's where he – is that true where he really became a big star in America?

**EJ:** Right. He was not on the show very often, but his name was on the show. They showed him during the credit, but he was uncooperative about doing TV. He was forced into it, and he would show up very sporadically. And it was not a good thing.

**JE:** And then one more tidbit about him, because we gotta move on – Is that in 1974 Francis Ford Coppola cast him, he had a small part in the Godfather part two as the fiancée of Connie Corleone.

**EJ:** Correct. And a fun fact about that is my brother had gone to New York Military Academy with Francis Ford Coppola. And so he had given Francis a part in the senior play, even though he was a sophomore at the time. And so Francis did a turnabout and cast Troy as Rural Johnson and Godfather 2.

**JE:** He was married a few times. And I suppose the most famous person was Suzanne Pleshette, who was an actress. Not married that long, were they?

**EJ:** (laughing) No, they dated for two years. And I think they were married for four months.

**JE:** And some will remember her from Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* and appeared in other TV roles. She actually died in 2004 and she was 70. So about Troy. Then he's, when did, how old was he when he died?

**EJ:** He was 65.

**JE:** 65 years old, yeah.

**EJ:** He was in really good shape. He was on his way back from the gym when the heart attack hit him and he just stumbled inside and after asked someone to call 911 and they were there within three minutes and got him to the hospital. But it was such a strong heart attack that they just really couldn't save him.

**JE:** Yeah. What a shock it had to be, then, for somebody who was in such great shape.

**EJ:** Yeah.

**JE:** Did you and – did you and Troy remain – So, I know you were nine years apart. But did he pay attention to you and family or how did you remain close?

**EJ:** Troy was the world's best brother. And when we were kids, oh, his friends had dogs when he had me. So I would trail along with the dogs (laughing). And I was very welcomed by his friends. I must say, I really appreciate that now that I'm older.

They let me tag along and when we all played football, they were very kind to me and didn't tackle me, but let me score some touchdowns and Troy taught me how to swim and sail and he was a wonderful, wonderful brother. He called me all the time to say, "Let's go to the beach!" or "Would you want to come to the studio today?" And you know, he picked me up at 7:00 in the morning and we go off to an adventure.

**JE:** Wow, that's great to hear. I didn't know that about him.

### **Chapter 03 – 6:18**

#### **Florida**

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**John Erling (JE):** Then what about Jimmy? Jimmy O'Neill – how did you meet Jimmy?

**Eve Johnson O'Neill (EJ):** Through my brother. And in fact, I had gone to Jimmy's first wedding reception and he introduced me to somebody there. He said, "If this marriage doesn't work out, Little Evie's next." And I think I was 14 or 15 at the time and we all just giggled and laughed and that was it.

**JE:** Were you known as little Evie or did he just make that name up for you?

**EJ:** He just described me as little Evie.

**JE:** Right. And little did he know then right?

**EJ:** Yeah. Little Eva was somebody else.

**JE:** Right. Right. So Jimmy was married, I think, three times and married to songwriter Sharon Sheeley. And I talked about her again. I do notice here in my notes that they refer to you as “socialite Eve Johnson” and you were, right? And then to Renee Whitman O'Neill. And then he had one son, James, that was with you, right?

**EJ:** Correct.

**JE:** And, unfortunately, we called him little Jimmy. He passed away – how many years ago?

**EJ:** Three years ago.

**JE:** And I think from cancer?

**EJ:** Yes.

**JE:** And then there's a daughter, Katy, and then stepson, your children, Robin and Megan, right?

**EJ:** Correct.

**JE:** Right. And I remember Robin and Megan, I guess little Jimmy too. But that was – that's sad. How old was little Jimmy when he died?

**EJ:** He was a very young 47. Like my brother, he was very handsome, very charismatic. Everybody loved him. He had a good life in his 47 years.

**JE:** Yeah, Jimmy O'Neill, then. He was born January 8th, 1940. And in Enid Oklahoma – Enid is 70 miles north of Oklahoma City – and as I recall, You could not take your Christmas tree down until January eight in honor of his birthday. Is that true?

**EJ:** That is correct. It was not only Jimmy's birthday, but it was also Elvis' birthday. So we kept the tree up as a tribute to him.

**JE:** And he was very proud to say it was Elvis's birthday as well, wasn't he, huh?



**EJ:** Very. Yes.

**JE:** Okay, Jimmy's parents, mother and father and name and a bit about them.

**JE:** Okay. His mother was an artist and she really did a lot of things. She was also a hairdresser there in Enid and she had quite a clientele and her – she was also an artist that painted under her maiden name, Gladys Robert. So she became Gladys Robert O'Neill.

Her husband was also a James O'Neill.

**JE:** They were divorced early in the life of Jimmy.

**EJ:** Very correct. Before James was – before Jimmy was a year old. They were divorced.

**JE:** So then he was raised by his mother. Then what about his father? Did he ever connect with him and meet up with him ever?

**EJ:** Yes. As a 19 year old, he met his father for the first time.

**JE:** How did that go? Did Jimmy talk about it? And of course, I suppose he did.

**EJ:** It went well. His father was working out here in California and had a lovely wife and they had a nice little ranch house himself. And we have to go out and visit them sometimes.

**JE:** So then his mother, Gladys. Is it fair for me to describe her as a stagedoor mother? Yes. She sent Jimmy away to a school in Florida when he was maybe 7 or 8 years old. And he used to spend all year in Florida for years going to school and touring with this choir. Now, Jimmy learned how to play the piano at that school and he was very good at it.

And so among the touring that they did, they went to play at the White House when Truman was president, he was very proud of playing for Harry Truman.

**JE:** Yes, I can imagine. And he would have been quite young, too. 10, 11 years old perhaps?

**EJ:** Yes.

**JE:** So that Apollo boys choir that – it was out of Florida. And his mother's – and how many years would he have been going to school in that school?

**EJ:** I'm thinking it was Maybe somewhere around 6, 7, 8 years.

**JE:** And interesting that she would send him there. This is a child and as I see pictures of him and knew him in person. He was a very charismatic man, very good looking. He had a lot going for him. So I mean, she obviously spotted that in him and wanted him in that school to train him because of this.

**EJ:** Exactly.

**JE:** She spotted that talent early on, you know, sometimes – sometimes we are proud moms and dads of our Children. And we say, well, “They're the brightest in the world.” When they really are not.

But, but in this case, Jimmy showed that kind of ability as you just said, 6, 7, 8 years old. And so she wanted him in that school. But it wasn't – didn't she also send him to Hollywood to live with a couple and – in the audition.

**EJ:** Yes. They lived in the Los Angeles area, Pomona actually, and he got a job at KRLA radio and he became very, very popular on the radio. I used to listen to him. And there was an age difference between the two of us, as well. He was about five years older than I was. So, while I was still in high school, I was listening to him on the radio.

**JE:** Yeah.

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**Chapter 04 – 9:07**  
**Pandora's Box**

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**John Erling (JE):** But let us take him back here. The way he got into radio, he started in Enid. Started hanging around the town radio stations, I understand. And KGWA was the station. As I understand, the students took over the local programming for a day and Jimmy led off the seven o'clock news and the manager liked his newscast. I don't know if Jimmy relayed those kind of details to you or not, but he hired Jimmy.

And by the time he was 16 years old, he was a night disc jockey. That was in 1957. And then at 17, he was earning \$200 a week. And then he went to WKY in Oklahoma City. And that's when he came across the song, Poor Little Fool, which was coincidentally written by his future wife, Sharon. And he created a demand for it. Such – so big that to this day it is Ricky Nelson's biggest hit.

So here he is, 16 and 17 years old, already at WKY. But then he jumped to Pittsburgh, a major major market on KQV and he was making \$300 a week. And then by that time, Jimmy was 19 and he did the morning show. Did he talk about this part that I'm visiting with you about?

**Eve Johnson (EJ):** A little bit, yes. Yeah, I have forgotten a detail here. You have a much better memory than I do. But, yes, that's all correct.

**JE:** And he was the youngest disc jockey in Pittsburgh to be ranked number one. So there, there we see this track where it eventually led him and then his Enid program director came up with another job for him and this time it was in California. And then that put him on KRLA, which you've already referenced.

And there he was. There so that by that time he was 19 or 20 years old and he was there from 1959 to 1962. Then he moved to KFWB from '63 to '67. So as you said, you remembered listening to him because it was rock and roll music, right?

**EJ:** Yes, it was.

**JE:** And Jimmy told an interviewer that when he went to KRLA, all the new disc jockeys were put on test shows and the manager fired everybody. Not of course, Jimmy O'Neill and he was the first voice heard on KRLA when it switched from country western format to top 40.

And it quickly became the powerhouse radio station up there. The station went up with Jimmy. Sales of recordings he favored went up and then launched him into television and into Shindig, which obviously we're going to be talking about.

Interesting how you listened to Jimmy. I don't know if you were a big fan of Jimmy on the radio or not or you just heard him or how it – how it worked with you.

**EJ:** Oh, we just keep our radios on KRLA. We didn't listen – we didn't, you know move around from station to station. We just kept them on there and let them.. Later on, it was the KFVB when Jimmy was working at KRLA.

**JE:** Let me come back to Sharon Sheeley because there's an interesting story here and we could do more on her as well. But she wrote, as I said earlier, Poor Little Fool. And she was the girlfriend of Eddie Cochran and she co-wrote Cochran's hit Something Else and she wrote for Ritchie Valens del Shannon and many, many others.

And then there was an automobile accident that many will remember in 1960 where Sharon and Jean Vincent survived the crash, but took the life of Eddie Cochran. And that was in 1960. Then in '61 she married Jimmy and they divorced five years later in 1966 and she died in 2002.

I know you were a former wife, but did you ever meet Sharon? Were you around her?

**EJ:** Oh, yes, I was around her. But before I was married to Jimmy and after I was married to Jimmy.

**JE:** I guess, they remained friends for some time afterward as you remain friends too, right?

**EJ:** Yes.

**JE:** So, then let's get into where he's already a big time disc jockey personality in Los Angeles. Then he gets involved with a nightclub called Pandora's Box, which was a nightclub coffee house on Sunset Strip in West Hollywood. It was at the center of the Sunset strip curfew of riots in 1966, which we'll talk about.

Now, Eve, I believe you went to Pandora's Box, right?

**EJ:** Yes, I did.

**JE:** Tell us about what you observed there. What was – what kind of a club? How did it operate?

**EJ:** It was a small club. It was on the corner of Crescent Heights and Sunset. So it was right in the heart of what people consider Hollywood. And they had music there all the time, live music and catered teenagers. No alcohol was served there. No food, just drinks. And it was just before the beatniks came in and everything was very, very fifties there.

And I remember seeing the Beach Boys playing there almost every time I went. Beach Boys were playing and Leon Russell was playing piano. It was someplace to go.

**JE:** Yes. Let me insert here that Leon Russell is an Oklahoman. He was born in Lawton, and of course, lived here in the Tulsa area and had his recording studio, the Church Studios. People from Oklahoma listening to this very well know him and of course, Leon was a great studio musician and then became, obviously, a big star himself. But you remember him there.

But then as you went, that was before, then, you'd ever was introduced to Jimmy, I believe. He came into ownership of that club, right? And – and how was that? Did he put money up against that, or was there a group or how did that work?

**EJ:** No, actually he was a part owner by appearing there and he would often, you know, introduce the group's there. So he was a regular fixture there and he didn't own a great deal of it. Most of the club was owned by the people who had started it.

**JE:** Okay. But they used his name and his personality and so, okay. I didn't realize that he was a big presence in the club in introducing people.

**EJ:** Yes, it was known as Jimmy O'Neill's Pandora Box.

**JE:** Okay. Alright. And so artists, like you said, the Beach Boys and The Birds, Sonny and Cher – do you remember any other people that might have been there?

**EJ:** I don't, I was going to boarding school and I would just get to go, you know, a couple of times a month and it was my go-to place when I did come home for the weekend.

**JE:** Where was boarding school?

**EJ:** That was in Pasadena.

**JE:** But then it became a kind of an eyesore or an ear sore to that area. Loud music, traffic congestion. It's one of the busiest intersections in the city. And then they established a curfew at 10 o'clock. And the young people perceived this as an infringement on their civil rights. And for weeks, lots of tension and protests.

And then one day one of the Los Angeles rock stations announced that there would be a rally at Pandora's Box. As many as a thousand people showed up, including Jack Nicholson and Peter Fonda, who was handcuffed by police, and had forced the closure of the club – opened on Christmas for one night.

Stephen Stills performed For What It Is Worth. It's just a song written in response to the riot and Buffalo Springfield had a hit of the song in 1967. So there's – and, and then I should finish this by saying in '66, the Los Angeles City Council voted to buy and demolish the club. It was demolished early in

August '67. So do you – would you remember then how long Jimmy hung with the club? Was it through to the end of it?

**EJ:** You know, I don't know. But knowing Jimmy, he probably hung with that until the end. Yeah. And then they demolished the club. The club was no longer there. Nothing has ever been built there.

**JE:** Oh really? Nothing at all? That's interesting.

**EJ:** No, it's just pavement.

**JE:** It has become sovereign ground, I guess, right? Holy ground.

**EJ:** It was part of the street. It was in a fork where Sunset met the beginning of Present Heights. So what they did was they just paved over it and it became part of the road.

## **Chapter 05 – 11:47**

### **Shindig**

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**John Erling (JE):** So this is all happening – and let's do the age thing here for Jimmy. He's 21, 22, 23, 24 years old and he's making some big time money. This is pretty heady stuff for this kid, I'm gonna call him, from Enid, Oklahoma who was tracked by a stage door mother to be a star and he became a star. No question about that. So then there are those who say to Jimmy, "I guess you should be on television." And, voila, there happened to be a television show that was being created called Shindig in 1964. So let's talk about Shindig. First of all, you remember watching it before you even were introduced to Jimmy, right?

**Eve Johnson (EJ):** Oh, no. The first time I saw, I bet Jimmy I was like 14 or 15, I knew him. I would see him around. This was – I was in New York going to college when Shindig was on. So, I would see it but I wasn't close to LA or what was going on here at the time.

**JE:** Alright. Well, a little background on Shindig is, it's interesting because so many people watch that – of a certain age, I will say, Eve. And there was a pilot of it was made, it wasn't taken by executives of any of the TV channel is because it had such a hard edge to it.

And –and Jimmy couldn't get it sold. He was going to leave LA. And as I understand, Sharon talked him out of it. Then Chuck Barris of The Gong Show, then an ABC executive, he reignited the pilot and then the show ran from '64 to 1966. And a new pilot was a new cast of artists which starred Sam Cooke and others.

It actually, I found out, it was interesting. You remember Hootenanny and, and then that – that specialized in folk music which went down the tube in '64 with the Beatles and the British invasion. So Shindig proclaimed a replacement for Hootenanny and it was on half hour every Wednesday evening, then expanded to an hour and then it split in two for Thursday and Saturday nights.

So it was a major, major hit for Jimmy. We had people like Jerry Lee Lewis, Sam Cooke, Chuck, Berry, Tina Turner, the Beatles. And let me say this about the Beatles: The Beatles couldn't come to Los Angeles to be on the show. So Jimmy and the whole crew took the whole show to London and that's where they recorded the show. And I think they did very – a number of shows from over there. Did Jimmy talk about Shindig to you? And, and some of the people that perhaps that he met?

**EJ:** Yes. I know he was very fond of some of the dancers who was friends with Bobby Sherman and Glen Campbell, he said, was one of the nicest people you could ever meet anywhere. And he was a semi-regular on Shindig. Jack Goode was the creator, but it lists here, Jimmy was the writer. So and of course, the emcee. So not only did the emcee but he wrote it as well, and that shows you more of the talent of Jimmy.

He opened each show with “Howdy. Hi, Shin Diggers. We've got a Shindig that so far in, it's out of sight.” That was his opening. Did you meet and did you meet the Righteous Brothers?



**EJ:** Yes, I met the Righteous Brothers actually in Omaha, Nebraska when they appeared for a show there and – nice guys. Very nice guys.

**JE:** Yeah, Bill Medley said of Jimmy. He said, “Jimmy was the perfect guy to host the show. He wasn't slick. He never tried to be too hip. He was just the perfect guy to hold all that together.” I should say, for those of you would like to see Shindig, you can go to YouTube and key in Shindig and you immediately see, I think, the first show they did and others as well.

But you'll see the complete show and you'll see, obviously, Jimmy there. To see what he looked like and what kind of a performer he was. And there were on Shindig, celebrity guests like Patty Duke and Douglas Fairbanks Jr., Vincent Price, Raquel Welch, Orson Welles and then musical guests. Oh my, there's a line, a long, long list. Everly Brothers, Aretha Franklin, Freddy Cannon. As you said, Glen Campbell Mama's and Papa's, all these that Jimmy – well, I don't know how well he got to know them, but he certainly was around them.

So, any more people that you can think of that he may have commented on or how he talked about maybe The Beatles?

**EJ:** Yes. I get – he had a good time with all of them. There wasn't really one person that he ever worked with that he said that they were uncooperative or hard to get along with. I think people that are successful in the music business tend to be a nice group of people where they get along, cooperate and work well together.

And I remember they used to spend off-time together too. And when Jimmy turned 21, a close friend of the family remained friends with our family for 65 years. He put together a birthday party – 21st birthday party celebration for Jimmy that included my brother Troy and Shelly for beers, hosting it at the home of Jan and Dean.

So that their home in Bel Air, Sam Cook was there, Ella Fitzgerald was there, Dinah Washington.. And a funny story: my grandmother, who was 83 at the time, was at the party and she was sitting on the couch flanked by Ella Fitzgerald and Dinah Washington. And there was a rumor that, uh, some narcotics officer undercover was at the party. And I don't know what

happened, but when my grandmother looked in her purse after we got home, she found a baggie of something that looked like oregano. She wondered how that got there. (laughs)

**JE:** Well, I can only see Jimmy laughing and smiling and just drinking that all in. That was, that was so Jimmy, wasn't it?

**EJ:** Oh, yeah. And cheers to him playing the piano and the all singing happy birthday. I mean, what, what a night to remember.

**JE:** Okay. He was 21 and were, you know, you were there because of Troy?

**EJ:** Yeah.

**JE:** Again, little did you know, right?

**EJ:** Yeah, I was about 15.

**JE:** Yeah. And then Jimmy – and you talked about Troy being so good to you. But Jimmy and Troy, as being related through marriage, they became friends, too, didn't they? Beyond just being related?

**EJ:** Yes. They were not close friends but, you know, they would be very happy, too, in each other's company when they bumped into each other at parties or, you know, they each had each other's phone number. So if they wanted to invite them to something they would do that.

**JE:** Jimmy and Shindig were depicted on the Flintstones that animated sitcom Shin Rock Agogo in 1965 and Jimmy played the part of Jimmy O'Neill Stone.

**EJ:** Yes, that was great fun for my son. He was so proud of the fact. I think he was prouder of the fact that his dad was a Flintstone than anything else that his dad ever did.

**JE:** Understandable. Right. Shindig was canceled in early 1966. He told the Chicago Tribune, he tried to burn his house down, literally set fire to his

house. He was 26 years old. Never had a bad break. Has he talked to you about that? What do you know about that?

**EJ:** I know that he was awash in drugs and alcohol. What kind of drugs? I don't know. I know they weren't the heaviest drugs. They were like uppers and downers and things like that. But when you put them with heavy drinking, it was not a good mix and he just couldn't cope with his marriage ending, his not working and all that good stuff. Not working at what he wanted to work, anyway.

**JE:** Yeah. And he was away from the business for a couple of years and then that's when he went to work at KDAY because –I think it's interesting you point that out. He actually was on the LAM probably because of drugs and alcohol for well over a year. But then he sobered up and then he did go back to work and working at KDAY from 1969 to '71.

**EJ:** Right, I was married to him by then.

**JE:** You were married as he went to KDAY?

**EJ:** Yes.

**JE:** Alright. And you lived there for some time?

**EJ:** We got married in 1969 and I worked for him for about a year before we got married. You worked for him? What did you do? I helped set up venues for some of his clients. He had a group that he managed, called Stark Naked and the Car Seat. And they were very good. Mostly they played locally. They would play Arizona, San Diego, of course, LA. And they were excellent. He had a few other groups too. Can't remember the names. Beautiful offices in West Hollywood and that's where I worked.

**JE:** And after Shindig, yes, he did have drugs and alcohol. But then he went to work and formed this promotional company. But then gave that up to go back into radio. Where were you and Jimmy married?

**EJ:** Tijuana, Mexico.

**JE:** Why Tijuana?

**EJ:** He said he would never ever get married in the United States because of the laws.

**JE:** Because of the law?

**EJ:** Because of the marriage law. If you get divorced after getting married in the United States, his chances of having to pay alimony made him decide he would never get married in the United States.

**JE:** Well, then your marriage license was seen as good in the United States then, right?

**EJ:** Actually, yes, I was working for an attorney by then had a look at it, make sure it was legal.

## **Chapter 06 – 6:25 Albuquerque**

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**John Erling (JE):** He's working, then, in Los Angeles at the radio station there. But then he leaves, and so do you, now. Both of you leave, and you moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico? Why did you move to that radio station, KOB? Why would he go from Los Angeles to Albuquerque?

**Eve Johnson (EJ):** Well, he wanted out of LA because we had just gone through the Northridge earthquake and it actually shook us out of bed and there was some damage to our home and possessions and it just scared him so much that he wanted out. And he told a friend and his friend told him about a job in Albuquerque at a large station there, KOB. He had the afternoon show, which is what he wanted. He didn't want any more early morning hours.

**JE:** I don't know how long he worked there. How long did you live there before?

**EJ:** Two years.

**JE:** Alright. Then, someone by the name of Tom Barsanti from WOW radio in Omaha, had worked in Albuquerque, had heard Jimmy and then he recommended Jimmy to Steve Shannon who was the manager of WOW, right?

**EJ:** Correct.

**JE:** Then I had been working at WOW. Then Jimmy came on and did mornings at WOW and really, I'm gonna say, electrified the radio station. I went to KOIL I was fired by WOW for telling a joke about Blue Cross and Blue Shield, which I'm happy to tell right now in which I have told on KRMG here in Tulsa just to see if I get fired again. And I wasn't.

And I told the joke about Blue Cross and Blue Blue Shield. They didn't increase its rate simply because they were out of town and it just slipped their minds. Well, Blue Cross, Blue Shield and WOW was one of the biggest accounts. I don't think Steve Shannon cared for me much anyway. And he fired me. And then I went to KOIL and ended up doing mornings and then Jimmy was hired away by KOIL from in Omaha from WOW. And then there was a contract and non-compete story there. That was a big thing in town, wasn't it, Eve?

**EJ:** Oh yeah.

**JE:** And – and there's a big fight and they didn't know if WOW had actually fired Jimmy because he was calling in too many times. And you would call Tom Barsanti and tell them that Jimmy can't make it, right?

**EJ:** Right.

**JE:** And – and then, so then they say they fired him where Jim – and Sam Holman at WOW said, “Well, if you fired him, then you can't enforce a non-compete.” And so that actually did that. That went to court, didn't it?

**EJ:** Yes, it did. I remember it was very, very tense courtroom. And luckily they ruled in Jimmy's favor so he could go to work for KOIL.

**JE:** Right. So I'm in the morning and then he's in the afternoon – that should have been flipped around. He should have done mornings. But he, as you said earlier, he was tired of getting up and doing that. And I'm grateful because if they put him in the mornings, I'd have been fired before that long before he. But Jimmy and I, then, were friends at KOIL ended both radio stations.

And so, and then we could say that, if people are still with us listening to this, and interested in radio stations, KOIL eventually was taken off the air for, on January 31st, 1975 the FCC denied license renewals for the entire Star Station groups which, of course, included KOIL.

And the FCC said it found serious misconduct of Star Stations. The commission found that Don Burden was intimately involved in and had knowledge of the misconduct and that the owners must be held responsible. So early then on September 2nd, 1976, the Star Stations went off the air by order of the FCC. And then at KOIL in Omaha, Jean Shaw told his audience during the final moments:

“It's been fun. It's been a good time. The last words on the mighty 12-90 were recorded by Star Station President Steve Shepard, KOIL wishes to thank all of the people who have enjoyed and depended on this radio station for the last 51 years. We are now leaving the air for an indefinite period of time by order of the FCC. This is KOIL Omaha.”

And KOIL's last song was The Sound Of Silence by Simon and Garfunkel. KOIL went silent at 12:01 a.m. and I was listening, Eve, and it was an eerie, eerie feeling and we should add that Don Burton died. He was 56 years old, he died in San Mateo, California May 12th, 1985. It was after a year long battle with lung cancer.

And so, you know, you think about things that happened in your life, that was the best thing that ever happened to me because then I discovered a job in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Sam Holman was the program director at KOIL and had been a personality at WABC in New York. And he knew people at Swanson Broadcasting here in Tulsa and he told me to contact them because they were looking for a morning man and he knew Garry

Swanson. And so I got the job in '76 and here I am to this very day.

So that worked out very, very well for me because I ended up at KRMG, the number one station in the town and I couldn't have landed on my feet in a better position in all of Oklahoma. And it was wonderful and it's been wonderful to me ever since. But this is not about me, this is about Jimmy, right?

**EJ:** Well, I enjoy talking about you, too, John because you're one of the nicest people I know.

**JE:** Well, thank you. But you are too.

## **Chapter 07 – 7:12**

### **End of Career and Life**

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**John Erling (JE):** Eventually, I think, Jimmy did an ad agency and then you went with him back to LA, right?

**Eve Johnson (EJ):** No, no, he left for LA and forgot to tell me he was leaving. My brother called me and he said, "Do you know where your husband is right now?" And I said, "I assume he's at home." And he said, "No, he's on an airplane. He's on his way here." Jimmy called his ex wife Sharon Sheeley and told her he was leaving. Omaha and me and was coming back to LA, had no idea what he was going to do.

But he just settled with her for a few days, partied to party. And then when he sobered up a little bit, he went over to my brother's and my brother was drinking too. So Jimmy started staying with my brother and they became roommates. First, my brother got sober and then Jimmy got sober. They went to AA.

**JE:** Mm, that's good. Good to hear that. So then did you file for divorce in Omaha?

**EJ:** No, we had to get a divorce in Mexico.

**JE:** Oh, of course, I forgot about that.

**EJ:** So he thought, too, about getting the divorce. I didn't have to do anything.

**JE:** Well, then here's Jimmy back in Los Angeles. So apparently, Eve, when Jimmy decided to go back to LA, he was not afraid of earthquakes.

**EJ:** I hadn't been, well, since they had had one. So, yeah, I guess he thought that it was safe.

**JE:** And he doesn't stay away from the radio station. He needs to earn some money. He goes back to KRLA from 1984 to 1985. Then he drops out from there. I don't know what he did after that, do you know?

**EJ:** He was working with them property owners and helping rent out apartments, but he wasn't an apartment manager. It was more than that, but people that didn't want to be bothered with their properties but owned them, he would manage them for them. But I mean, it was a lot of properties.

**JE:** But then he went back into radio in KRLA from 1990 to 1993. And then, I believe, that ends his radio career. Because then he retired then – somewhere in the mid '90s, right?

**EJ:** Right.

**JE:** And then he died five days after his 73rd birthday.

**EJ:** He was very contented even though he wasn't making a lot of money. He still lived well in West Hollywood. He had an apartment there which he shared with his daughter. It was very nice place. Although he didn't have the affluence that he had earlier in his career, he was contented and happy and he was also working on a radio project and he thought he'd put them on the internet. But unfortunately, or fortunately, he died while he was working on with someone on that, he died in his sleep. And I say fortunately because it was an up period in his life and he was doing things that he was looking forward to and happy doing.



**JE:** All right. So then, then he died January 11 of 2013 at 73. And what was it? A heart attack that took him?

**EJ:** Yes.

**JE:** I was taken with this because when I was around him, I didn't realize he was from Oklahoma. And then I realized, as I learned more about him, he was from Enid and was there and left, you know, a few years after high school and so talented as a young man. And I didn't know that whole story about him until later in time. And particularly now as I've done this research on him.

But he was the most talented, most charismatic person that I had ever, ever worked with. And he was always enjoyable to be around and smiling, somewhat witty, but I don't think particularly a comedian, but he could laugh and cut up with anybody. But it was just his presentation and I was so taken with that.

And, you know, Eve, I learned a lot from Jimmy, particularly his use of the phones for opinions. He did a lot of polling – “call me now” on such a topic and on music could be anything else. I'd never heard anyone use the phones the way he did. So I learned a lot and I brought that right with me here to Tulsa, Oklahoma. So I'm indebted to him for that.

**EJ:** Well, he would be honored to hear that, John.

**JE:** What I find fascinating is he never talked about his days in Los Angeles and Shindig, radio. He never talked about those days to us and the staff.

**EJ:** That's interesting. I didn't know that.

**JE:** And he may have talked to some but man, as much as I was around him, I never ever knew that about him. So I found that interesting, too. Well, I'm glad I could help tell Jimmy O'Neill's story, because of his Oklahoma connection and this young man was born to be it.

Now, what could he have done beyond what he did? We don't know. But I'm glad to know that you felt he was contented at the end of his life, right?

**JE:** Yes, he always spoke very, very well of Oklahoma and Enid in particular. He said that people were wonderful there and he just had a lot of good memories that he conveyed. Alright. Well, Eve, we never thought we'd be doing this, but we did it together. We wanted to lift his name in front of Oklahomans and how talented he was. So I appreciate you doing this, Eve, very much. Is there anything else that we should add to this story?

**EJ:** I just want to say that, Jimmy was very, very fond of you, John, and you were a really – a really good friend and I want to thank you for that and you've been a good friend to me as well, as Jimmy.

**JE:** Thank you, Eve, I enjoyed it and let's get together in Tulsa, okay?

**EJ:** Great. Thank you, John.

## **Chapter 08**

### **Conclusion**

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