

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Announcer: Oklahoma native John A. Brock was raised in Oklahoma City and graduated from Classen High School in 1948. In 1953 he graduated from the University of Oklahoma with a B.S. in Geological Engineering. He served in the U.S. Army Artillery in Korea from 1953 to 1955 when he began his career in the oil business with Shell Oil Company.

John returned to Oklahoma in 1968 to become executive vice president and general manager of LVO Corporation in Tulsa, followed by president of Southport Exploration, chairman of Medallion Petroleum, Inc., and chairman of Brighton Energy, LLC.

John endowed the Brock Chair of Energy Economics and Policy and the John A. Brock Endowed Chair in Engineering Leadership at the University of Oklahoma. He also established the Brock Chair for Education Leadership and the Brock Chair for Education Innovation at Oklahoma State University.

Listen to John talk about the ups and downs of the Oil industry and the investments he made in our state on the podcast and the oral history website, VoicesOfOklahoma.com.

Chapter 2 – 9:50

Early Days

John Erling (JE): My name is John Erling and today's date is June 28th, 2023.

John, would you state your full name, please?

John Brock (JB): John Aubrey Brock. I am a junior but I haven't used the junior since my father died in 1945.

(JE): Okay. Alright. And we're recording this interview in the offices and studios of VoicesOfOklahoma.com. Your birth date?

(JB): September the 12th, 1930.

(JE): And your present age?

(JB): 92 years old.

(JE): 92 years old. I'm gonna talk a little bit about being 92. What are you doing these days?

(JB): Well, I still go to the office every day, John, but I don't have much to do anymore. So I play bridge and I walk and have different organizations, book clubs, et cetera. But, mainly, I go to the office and manage my affairs.

(JE): Right. Which is remarkable at your age.

(JB): Well, most of my friends are gone and so I don't have much else to do.

(JE): Right. But you must be grateful. What are the issues of being your age?

(JB): Well, nothing works the way it used to and most of the things don't work very well. So, I spend quite a bit of time trying to maintain myself.

(JE): Do you do any -- You said you walk? Do you walk for exercise?

(JB): And I walk for exercise and I have a routine that I go through occasionally -- get massages and yoga and that sort of thing.

(JE): Keep yourself -- and you do yoga.

(JB): Yes, I do.

(JE): That's good. Is that meaningful for you?

(JB): Well, it seems to keep my joints working okay.

(JE): Where were you born?

(JB): I was born in Durant, Oklahoma.

(JE): And I looked up people; nobody is as famous as you from Durant, of course, but Reba McIntyre, famous actress and singer.

(JB): Yes. That's right.

(JE): And Dennis Rodman: NBA basketball player.

(JB): Oh, that's right.

(JE): A very colorful person...

(JB): Indeed.

(JE): ...came from Durant. This was the beginning of the Great Depression that you were born and for the next 10 years, nine years --

(JB): I lived through most of the whole thing.

(JE): And what are your remembrances of that?

(JB): Well, I remember that people would come around asking for food. My mother would feed them. And nobody had any money, including my family. We were never hungry but there was never any extra money around.

(JE): Were you on a farm?

(JB): No, I was in the city of Durant, and my father worked for a bank there. He was a young man that was the treasurer of the bank.

(JE): And Dust Bowl probably didn't affect you any?

(JB): Well, being in Eastern Oklahoma, we were not in the dust parts -- the dust would come by from there occasionally. But, mainly, we missed that.

(JE): Yeah. Your mother's name?

(JB): Bertha Stewart was her maiden name.

(JE): And where did she live and grow up?

(JB): She was born in a little town -- actually on a farm -- near Idabel, Oklahoma. So she lived on a subsistence farm.

(JE): What does that mean?

(JB): Well, that means that they made everything and grew everything that they used, except for sugar and flour; and other than that, they made it all.

(JE): Alright. And what was her personality like?

(JB): Oh, my mother was a delightful person and very sophisticated for someone that came from her background. She was the most important influence in my life.

(JE): Really? What do you think you drew from her?

(JB): Well, she was kind and she was responsible and she liked to have fun; and I like to do all -- I like all those things.

(JE): Right. So then your father's name?

(JB): His name was John Aubrey Brock. He was a senior.

(JE): And he? Where was he from and grew up?

(JB): He was born in Idaabel, Oklahoma. And they... Actually, their family just came from Arkansas -- Delight. My mother went to high school and they met in high school in Idabel.

(JE): So then your father, his personality?

(JB): He was a very gregarious guy and people loved him. My mother said he never ate lunch alone. He was that kind of guy.

(JE): And then you said earlier, he was a banker.

(JB): That was when he was very young. He actually went into the insurance business and we moved from Durant -- where he had started in the insurance business after quitting the bank -- to Oklahoma City where he was a general agent for the Equitable Life of Iowa.

(JE): I'm trying to trace -- you became a businessman yourself -- inspired most by your father perhaps?

(JB): Well, he always wanted me to go to one of the Eastern business schools. But he died when I was 16 years old; and there wasn't any option of doing that. And I was lucky to go to the University of Oklahoma.

(JE): You had brothers and sisters?

(JB): I was the oldest of four. My brother, Stewart, was next and then Suzanne and Nancy in that order -- Nancy is my youngest sibling.

(JE): Are they still living?

(JB): They're all still living.

(JE): Good. So, are they near you in age?

(JB): No; I'm 13 years older than Nancy, and 5.5 years older than Stewart, and 7.5 years older than Suzanne.

(JE): Okay. So my math says they're well into their seventies and eighties then.

(JB): Oh, yes. That's right.

(JE): Tell us about the first house that you lived in.

(JB): Well, it was a little stucco place on East 13th Street in Durant. The railroad ran right back through our backyard. We were kind of at the edge of town. I left there when I was five years old, so I don't remember a lot about it.

(JE): Okay. But did you have electricity and plumbing?

(JB): Oh, yes. Yes, we did. And water. And, yes, that's right.

(JE): Okay. So you left there when you were five years old.

(JB): Yes.

(JE): And then you hadn't begun your education yet?

(JB): No.

(JE): And so then where did you move?

(JB): I moved to Oklahoma City and I was -- from the time I got there -- I was too old to be in kindergarten. So I started first grade in Oklahoma City.

(JE): And why was the move made?

(JB): When my father got a new job and he became the Equitable Life of Iowa general agent for the state of Oklahoma.

(JE): So your father was successful. You were living, at least, at the middle or upper income level.

(JB): Well, we were. Like I say, we never were hungry. We had plenty; we had enough money. We had more money than most of the people at the time.

(JE): You remember the first cars you can remember in the family?

(JB): I think it was a 1937 Chevrolet when we got to Oklahoma City.

(JE): Do you remember? Did you drive Chevys all the time or jump to ...?

(JB): Well, the first new car we ever owned was a Nash, after World War II. It came out with a wooden bumper. They didn't have enough metal to make the bumpers right after World War II.

(JE): I never heard that before. When was the first car you owned?

(JB): My first car was a 1949 Ford four-door sedan. And I got it when I was in college. When I was a senior in college.

(JE): So, then, your first grade in what school?

(JB): Eugene Field.

(JE): All right. So grade school through...?

(JB): The first grade and then we moved to a new house a little further out and I went to Hawthorn Elementary School and there was a Brock in the Hawthorn Elementary School for 19 years after that.

(JE): Oh, okay. So then was that junior high school and high school?

(JB): I went to Taft Junior high school and Classen high school?

(JE): All right. So, Classen high school. What was your experience there? Did you get involved in it?

(JB): It was a great high school and we loved it. It had all kinds of exceptional courses. Story was that if you took a course, it'd take 21 years to get out. It was very much like Tulsa Central High School, probably.

(JE): Were you excelling in any particular subject or activities?

(JB): Well, I always like history. The science courses -- I took my first geology course there.

(JE): And you didn't know that was going to lead you to something else, for sure.

(JB): That's right. For sure.

(JE): Interesting why you took a geology course. Why did you?

(JB): Well, I was just interested in the earth.

(JE): Okay. Alright. Good enough. And so what year did you graduate?

(JB): In the spring of 1948.

(JE): All right.

Chapter 3 – 7:55

Korean War

John Erling (JE): So we bypassed 1941 here. You would have been 10 years old December 7th, 1941. You may have some memories of that day.

John Brock (JB): I do. We were living on West 13th Street in Oklahoma City at the time, and the streets were not paved at that time. Subsequently, they paved them while we lived there. I remember that news boys and cars would come up and down the streets yelling, "Extra, extra!" And that's the first and only "Extra" I've ever witnessed. But that was on December 7th. And that afternoon is when they came by.

(JE): Did that have any effect on members of your family? Uncles or anybody?

(JB): My uncle went into the army. And some of my parents' friends went into the army. And my father had four children, and he was old enough that he didn't get called.

(JE): So other than that day, then, the war went on and probably, as a young child, it was not an issue.

(JB): Well, we lost our paper boy; he was killed during the war.

(JE): Oh, yeah. So, obviously, that had an impact. So you graduate in 1948 from Classen. And so then where do you go to school?

(JB): University of Oklahoma.

(JE): And why there?

(JB): Everyone else was going there. I could afford it.

(JE): Yeah.

(JB): So, I joined the Delta Fraternity. My tuition then was \$88 a semester, which is just a fraction of what it costs now. It was a fine school, and I enjoyed it, and I had a good experience there.

(JE): Okay. So that would have been 1949 or so.

(JB): Well, the fall of '48 is when we started.

(JE): Okay. Sports is always interesting. At that time, what was going on?

(JB): I was there when the football history started for OU. Bud Wilkinson became the coach when I was a sophomore and I went there for five football seasons and never saw him lose a game.

(JE): How about that?

(JB): He lost some away but none at home.

(JE): How exciting that was.

(JB): That was; we loved it.

(JE): And he was quite a man, wasn't he.

(JE): He was.

(JB): His son has told his story here on VoicesOfOklahoma.com

(JB): Oh, has he? He's a man that everyone admired and respected.

(JE): They sure did. And he became a commentator on ABC, as a matter of fact, beyond that. Yeah, that was fun for you. But then you probably had to go into the classroom too. So, then, what was study?

(JB): Well, I majored in business my freshman year and I found that the economics class was very boring, so I switched to engineering after the first semester. And I graduated in geological engineering.

(JE): In what year?

(JB): January of '53.

(JE): Are you able to go on and get into the business? I think something else was going on in the world.

(JB): Well, there was. I started to work for Shell Oil Company when I got out and with the understanding that I'd gotten a commission in Army ROTC, and then I was called up within a month of my graduation, and got ready to go to Korea.

(JE): Korean War was from 1950 to '53. So you were being called up near the end of that war.

(JB): That's right. I got to Korea at the end of '54, just after the armistice. I didn't have to kill anyone. No one killed me. And I thought that was a good trade off.

(JE): Right. That's when North Korea invaded South Korea, of course. And I always remember the talk about the 38th parallel...

(JB): Yes.

(JE): ... dividing the two countries and the whole nation knew that was the line and we were well aware of it in Korea.

(JB): That's right. When I -- at the end of the war, we were a little bit north of the 38th parallel. That's where my position was. We were on Heartbreak

Ridge. They established the demilitarized zone. Our part of it was north of 38th parallel. Not much.

(JE): What company were you attached to? What type was it?

(JB): I was in the 13th Field Artillery Battalion, 24th division.

(JE): So what did you actually do?

(JB): I was a ... I had several jobs. When I got there, I was a company executive officer. And I became the battalion reconnaissance survey officer, the "S2", which is the intelligence officer. And later I became the fire direction officer.

(JE): They noticed early on you had leadership abilities, and obviously they put you to work. That Heartbreak Ridge that was like a month-long battle.

(JB): It was. Our sector was Heartbreak Ridge on the left Sandbag Castle in the center and on the right, The Punch Bowl. But Heartbreak Ridge is the most famous part. So I always tell people that's where I was.

(JE): Right, and I read about it here because the Koreans were using a ridge of hills there as an observation point.

(JB): Yes. And it was very mountainous and there was about a mile between our front line and their front line. And we were on a mountain, and they were facing us with another mountain. There's a valley in between.

(JE): But, then, you were able to drive them out of there.

(JB): Well, that's the way the war ended. That's the way they established the demilitarized zone. Heartbreak Ridge ran perpendicular to the lines.

(JE): Okay. Alright. Did you have any friends who died in the war?

(JB): No, I had a lot of friends that served but none that died in the war. I had 10 fraternity brothers that died in the Cold War in the service of the country.

(JE): After the war, something major happens. You must have met somebody, because...

(JB): Well, I had met my wife before, at the University of Oklahoma; and we wrote letters for the 14 months that I was in Korea back and forth. And as soon as I got home and was discharged, we got married here in Tulsa.

(JE): And her name?

(JB): Donnie Vaughn.

(JE): Okay. And then you had children?

(JB): We had three children: Kimberly, who lives in Tulsa with her husband David Downing; Vaughn who lives in Austin with his wife, Jerri; and Holly, who also lives in Tulsa with her husband, Ed Harris.

(JE): Okay. So, do you -- how many grandchildren do you have?

(JB): 12.

(JE): Wow.

(JB): Each of my children had 4.

(JE): Oh, wow.

(JB): I'm blessed with 10 grandsons and 2 granddaughters.

(JE): Yeah. Great. And then how long were you married?

(JB): 62 years.

(JE): And then that marriage came to an end because she passed away.

(JB): Yes, she died in 2016.

(JE): But I believe you have a long-time companion right now.

(JB): I do. Her name is Alicia House. She's a widow. And we've been going together for about three or four years.

(JE): Yeah.

Chapter 4 – 9:05

Ups and Downs of Oil

John Erling (JE): Things went on in the world. I'll just throw this at you: November 22nd, 1963 President John Kennedy was assassinated. Do you remember that day?

John Brock (JB): I do. We lived in New Orleans at the time. I was with Shell Oil Company and I was not well. I was driving home from work when I heard it on the car radio.

(JE): Yeah. Well, then the country went into mourning for many, many days and I remember the radio, all they played was classical music on the radio and the coverage, of course.

(JB): I don't remember much about that, but it was a very upsetting time for everyone.

(JE): Right. You were with Shell Oil Company. And what were you doing? What was your position?

(JB): I was a reservoir engineer for Shell.

(JE): What does that mean?

(JB): Well, we manage the oil and gas reservoirs and figured out how to produce them, and how much they were going to produce, and whether we ought to drill wells to develop them or not.

(JE): Oil exploration business -- there are hits and misses, aren't there?

(JB): Yes, I was there with Shell for about 11 years, including the time I was away with in the military. In 1964, I moved to Houston where I was the Director of Exploration for a little oil company called Associated Oil and Gas.

(JE): Let me come back to when you were with Shell. You and a team would calculate, I suppose... Remember now, I'm a North Dakota farm boy, so I don't know anything about this.

(JB): Yeah.

(JE): ... as to where you should be exploring for oil.

(JB): That's right.

(JE): Talk me through this, because there had to be some time that your calculation was wrong. Is that true?

(JB): You get dry holes occasionally.

(JE): And is that because you miscalculated? How did that come about?

(JB): Well, that's right. You know, you can't see down 10 - 12,000 ft where your target is, so you guess about it using scientific information and your intuition, and occasionally you miss the target. Most of the time in our business -- we were in the development business -- and we were developing old fields that had already been discovered. But most of the time we were successful, but occasionally we would get a dry hole.

(JE): Yeah. And where was it you were exploring?

(JB): Well, first, with Shell, I was in the training program and we traveled all over the country, learning about how they did their business. And my first permanent assignment was Kilgore, Texas in the East Texas field. I was there for three years. Went to Corpus Christi; was there for three years. And then I went to Jackson, Mississippi and was there for a couple of years, and then went to New Orleans and that's where I left them -- in New Orleans.

(JE): But, to start, you were working on the rig -- you were a rough neck.

(JB): Well, during the training program, you had to be a rough neck. You had to be a roustabout. And we had other training assignments too, at gasoline plants and places like that.

(JE): Yeah. Well, I'm sure you left there having healthy respect for the roustabouts.

(JB): I did. It's a great thing to start at the bottom and do all the work.

(JE): Did they treat you right? Here, these guys are over here that we know we're going to be here all the time, and here comes this young punk coming along. Did they treat you differently?

(JB): Mostly. Oh, well, they recognize that I might be their boss one day.
(Laughing)

(JE): (Laughing)

(JB): So they treated me well. But we had a good experience.

(JE): But it was --

(JB): But it was a wonderful company to work for.

(JE): Yeah, and I'm sure you understood even more as you went on, the importance of you starting at the bottom.

(JB): Oh, that's right; we have to know everything.

(JE): So we bring you to Associated Oil and Gas. And what's happening there?

(JB): Well, they wanted me to start an exploration program, which I did. They had no geologist or engineers. So I hired about a staff of about 10 people. And I learned my first lesson there; and that is: You hire people that are smarter than you are and wonderful things happen. So we succeeded.

(JE): You know, that takes a lot for people to do that. They're afraid that somebody is sitting at the table and he knows more than I do. Did you do that right off? You knew that, or did you learn from experience?

(JB): Well, I suspected that, but I proved it during that experience. We succeeded, and three of the geologists that I hired turned out to be millionaire oilmen later on. And you can attribute most of our success to those guys.

(JE): Yeah. But then it was good because you were making decisions, and when the guy sits down at the table, and he speaks, you had confidence in what he said.

(JB): Yes.

(JE): That's why it's important to have somebody who is smarter than you.

(JB): That's right. You got to listen to your people and make sure they're smarter than you and it'll work out fine.

(JE): And then they had tremendous respect for you, too, that you would do that. Associated Oil and Gas: So then how many years were you with that?

(JB): I was there for two years, lost that job, and then I went on my own for two years and this is the depths of the oil field depression. And you couldn't get jobs -- couldn't find much money to work with. So, I spent the first year looking for ... putting together a prospect, buying the leases, raising the money to drill it, supervise the drilling, and that was a dry hole. So I was back to square one after a year.

Then I got a prospect from a friend of mine that I had known back at Shell. It hit. We made -- found the Hope Field, which is in Lavaca County, Texas. It was a terrific prospect. I was able to sell it to oil people in Houston. And I kept a large reversionary interest after payout. So I didn't get any money from that field for four years. But this time I decided I didn't have enough money to for working capital to continue that. And I came to Tulsa as the

Exploration Vice president in charge of all of the exploration of the company for Livingston Oil Company -- later called LVO Corporation.

(JE): Okay. Let me come back. You said "oil depression." And about when was that? What years?

(JB): Well, that would be 1966.

(JE): Right. What led to that? Why wasn't there much business?

(JB): Well, we had plenty of oil in the world. They were restricted to how much you could produce, so you couldn't make much money; and the Federal Power Commission wouldn't let you get to making money in the gas business. There wasn't anything going on.

But I worked for Livingston here in Tulsa. Wayne Swearingen was the president. Yeah. I'm sure you remember him.

(JE): Yes.

(JB): And Murray Gillette was the Executive Vice President. After six years there, I made a lot of contacts in the financial business and we succeeded again. Same thing: We hired people smarter than we were.

(JE): Oh, so you went out on your own then?

(JB): No, for that six years of the LVO corporation, we built it up and we succeeded again. And by this time, the Federal Power Commission had created a shortage in natural gas and the price of gas locally was going up and they finally turned loose the price and we were able to make a profit in natural gas. The president of the -- that at that time -- Murray Gillette and I left the company and started our own company called Southport Exploration.

And we were assisted by the Rothschild Bank in London. And, because one of my friends was at Shell and was in working in London with the Rothschilds, and he persuaded them it was time to get into the oil business and that benefited us. We later bought them out for 60 times

what they put into us. We ran Southport for six years; and participating with us and putting up the money for our drilling was Vulcan Materials Corporation of Birmingham, Alabama. They thought it was easy. So after six years, they wanted to own the company, and so we sold it to them and lived happy ever afterward. And I've done that twice more since then.

Chapter 5 – 6:15

Make Things Happen

John Erling (JE): I'm, I'm just gonna ask you: What do you think your strengths were as you were in your business? What were your strengths?

John Brock (JB): Making things happen. That's the hardest thing to do is to make things happen. And I was able to do that. And that means when something needs to be done, you go do it; you don't linger. And I was able to, hire people, raise the money, put the prospects together and drill the wells.

(JE): So you could grab a hold of a project and make it happen -- and that isn't a natural ability for just everybody to do that, is it?

(JB): Well, that's the biggest shortage we have in any industry is people that can make things happen. And, fortunately, I was able to do that. I had the drive and the confidence to do it.

(JE): Southport Exploration -- and then you sold that.

(JB): That's right.

(JE): And then?

(JB): And then we started Medallion Petroleum. And my partner, Bill Warnock, came on board 38 years ago and we've been partners ever since.

(JE): Oh. So that Medallion Petroleum still exists today?

(JB): Well, the corporation does and we have a few mineral interests, and it pays the electric bill, and that's about it. We sold the properties of that company in about a few more years. Then, later, we started another company and built it up and sold it.

(JE): Really? What was that name?

(JB): Brighton Energy.

(JE): Is there a moment in your life when you're fighting for existence, and then you go beyond that just "fighting for existence," and you begin to accumulate wealth.

(JB): After you learn how to do it, pretty soon you start making more money than you need. And, yeah, I started accumulating wealth as soon as I sold Southport. And that, from then on, I was able to relax about making money, but we were able to do it again twice.

(JE): Right. So does that come in a moment? In a day? Or is that, all of a sudden, you're saying, "Wait a minute, I'm making more money than I need here. I'm actually getting wealthy."

(JB): Well, that's right. You make that -- have -- that understanding when you sell that first company because, until then, you're living on a shoestring.

(JE): Well, I know there had to be a celebration time in here someplace that you knew...

(JB): Every time you sell a company, it's time for celebration. (Laughing)

(JE): Pop the corks, right? And, then, I guess, you start thinking, "Well, all this extra money and what am I gonna do with it?" Did you invest? Did you put it in charitable? Or what did you do?

(JB): Well, of course, after we sold Southport, we invested in Medallion, and then invested in Brighton. At some point, you decide you want to change the world.

(JE): Yes.

(JB): At that time, I tried to figure out what the important thing was that we could change. And after quite a bit of discussion and thought, I decided the biggest problem we have in this country is ignorance. And the solution to that is to improve the education. And I've spent most of the time since -- in the last 40 years -- trying to help education.

(JE): Well, let's talk about some of the things then that you got involved with. You organized and was -- you were chair -- of Oklahomans for Lawsuit Reform.

(JB): Yes. We had a problem in Oklahoma that all these frivolous lawsuits were going on. So we tried to change the laws in order to squelch that. George Kaiser and I raised about \$2 million and we started an initiative petition to fix lawsuit problems we had. After we raised the money, the plaintiff's bar came to us and said, "Can we negotiate?"

Which we did. We got what we wanted -- didn't have to go through the initiative petition and I sent all the money back.

(JE): What did you want?

(JB): Well, we wanted a limit on punitive damages and several technical things like that. And we got them.

(JE): Is that what we're talking about: tort reform?

(JB): Yeah. Tort reform.

(JE): So the plaintiffs can only ask for a certain amount of money.

(JB): They can only get a certain amount.

(JE): Only get a certain amount. Okay; they can ask for more. Exactly. Right. And so you prevailed on that.

(JB): We did, we did; and it worked out great.

(JE): Why was it --

(JB): We did the same thing for workers compensation.

(JE): And what did you do there?

(JB): Well, we were able to get that through the legislature and that passed the same thing -- same way -- by threatening initiative petition. It's a rather technical problem and it'll take us quite a while to tell you what was wrong with it. But we solved most of the problems. Our workers compensation cost for our industry went down radically as a result of that.

(JE): Yeah, you know, you got involved. There are a lot of people who would have taken their money and run and just played, but you didn't do that. You got involved in our state laws and reform and you must feel good about that -- some of those victories.

(JB): I do, I do. I like to say that when I got out of college, I was gonna change the world. And after working on that for a while, I decided to change the laws of the state. And then we worked on the city and changed and changed some laws here in the city through an initiative petition. And then after that I was going to do the toughest job of all: and that was to get my wife to let me reorganize her kitchen. (Laughing)

(JE): (Laughing)

Chapter 6 – 8:35

Community Involvement

John Erling (JE): You endowed the Brock Chair of Energy Economics and Policy at OU.

John Brock (JB): I did.

(JE): And then organizer and Director of the Trust Company of Oklahoma. So that's education, the Brock Chair of Energy; is that still in existence?

(JB): We just changed it and moved it to the engineering school at OU. But now we're using it to promote engineers -- people going into engineering. We don't have enough engineers. We want to expand the engineering courses at OU.

(JE): I wonder why we don't have enough engineers.

(JB): Well, we're fat, dumb and happy these days. They don't have the drive we used to and people want to do things like play music instead of building buildings and finding oil.

(JE): Well, I mean, playing music is important as I'm sure. And you know that. Geological engineering is a tougher way to go and so it's easier to go somewhere else. Am I simply saying...?

(JB): You know, it's a more challenging course, engineering is, compared to others.

(JE): You created the Tulsa Innovation Center, providing new opportunities for employment and economic development in Northeast Oklahoma.

(JB): We did. We raised a couple of million bucks and started funding entrepreneurs here. That's been quite a while. But we had a little success doing that.

(JE): So entrepreneurs just getting started -- they would appear before you and present their model?

(JB): That's right.

(JE): And some you funded, and some you didn't.

(JB): That's right.

(JE): But that had to give you ... because some of you did, and they went on to be successful.

(JB): We had 3 out of 10 that succeeded and they built up their businesses, and sold them, and none of them exist anymore. But we still have that need. And I've been involved with entrepreneurship support over the years.

(JE): And I think some of that is going on in our city.

(JB): Oh, yeah; we're still working on it.

(JE): You were director of the Sutton Avian Research Center and a supporter of the Philbrook Museum...

(JB): Yes.

(JE): Tulsa Ballet, Tulsa Opera, Tulsa Zoo. Man, you got involved, didn't you? Served on the board of the Salvation Army, the Oklahoma Nature Conservancy, Gilcrease Museum, and the Indian Nations Council of Boy Scouts.

(JB): Yes. we're still on that board.

(JE): Were you a boy scout?

(JB): No, I was not, but my father was a scout master. And by the time I got that age, he was gone and I was busy trying to make some money.

(JE): Yeah. You're a member of the Oklahoma Hall of Fame, I know. University of Tulsa College of Business Hall of Fame, and the recipient of the University of Oklahoma Regents Award. So, you were definitely recognized, but you had a special interest in public art and you were instrumental in installing the Oklahoma Indian Ballerina statue on the Williams Center Green in Tulsa.

(JB): That's right. And we also put the Appeal to the Great Spirit in Woodward Park.

(JE): The great spirit. Exactly. Right. And why was that of interest to you?

(JB): I've always loved art and nice things, and I went to Kansas City one time and they had beautiful statues and I said, "We've got to do that in Tulsa." So I came back, I was playing tennis with Jay O'Meilia, and I told him that. He said, "You're just the guy I want to see. I want to put the ballerina statue on the Williams Green."

So I said, "Well, let me see if I can raise the money for you."

So I went to John Williams, told him what we wanted to do, and he said, "I'll have a cocktail party, and you bring your artist up here, and make the pitch and it's up to you."

In 15 minutes, we raised the money for the whole statue.

(JE): How much was it?

(JB): I don't even remember.

(JE): Yeah. Right.

(JB): But what we did is we sold maquettes; we sold 20 maquettes to the people who put the money up.

(JE): Maquettes?

(JB): Yeah, that's a miniature statue.

(JE): Oh, oh, I see. So they each got one for it.

(JB): The people that put the money up got a maquette.

(JE): That was a great idea. Alright. You hit on two gentlemen that I've interviewed for VoicesOfOklahoma.com: Jay O'Meilia.

(JB): Yes. What a great guy.

(JE): And what a great, fun man he was.

(JB): He was.

(JE): And, yeah, we had a great time interviewing. And you played tennis with him.

(JB): Neither one of us were very good tennis players. (Chuckling) But, yes.

(JE): How did you get to know him?

(JB): At the tennis club.

(JE): Oh, okay. Alright. And then he was such a big OU fan.

(JB): Oh, yes. Yes, he was.

(JE): And created the picture of von Schmann when he kicked the goal.

(JB): I was there when he kicked the goal.

(JE): At Ohio State.

(JB): That's right. It was an exciting moment.

(JE): And you were there?

(JB): I was there. And of course, Jay was on the sideline and he recreated that.

(JE): He did. And yeah, so that was -- that was fun for you. And then John Williams, I've also interviewed, and what a great man he was.

(JB): He certainly was.

(JE): John Williams, when we look back on the city, and you're talking about fathers of our community.

(JB): He was the man, wasn't he?

(JE): He was certainly one of them.

(JB): He sure was.

(JE): I would say Mayor Bob LaFortune was another one.

(JB): Yes.

(JE): And those two worked in tandem downtown Tulsa.

(JB): They did.

(JE): The PAC and all that. Am I leaving anybody out here? I mean, that -- isn't that true?

(JB): Oh, yes. Well, we had some great city fathers at the time. We had a different governmental system and I think, you know, our city has suffered with under the city council.

(JE): Because the mayor had strong...

(JB): Well, you know, we had the city commission before and everyone on the commission was responsible for a segment of our economy, or a segment of the government. And I think that worked better than what we have now.

(JE): I remember John went to Bob LaFortune when they were going to build the Williams Tower. He goes to Bob LaFortune and says, "I'd like to block off Boston." Bob thinks that's a good idea -- and the two of them in the office -- and then they had to sell it. But I mean, that's how it worked back then.

(JB): That's right.

(JE): When you had those power leaders. If I can just say one: John talks about one time he was walking out of the Williams building, and he jaywalked at

the corner there, and a police officer said, "I'm sorry, sir, I'm gonna have to ..."

(JB): Write you a ticket.

(JE): "...write you a ticket." Right. And you know the story, don't you?

(JB): I don't. He says, "I'm going to have to write you a ticket."

And John says, "Well, I'm just walking across the street,"

And "No; there is no jaywalking going on here. Let me see your identification."

And John holds up his identification, and the officer says -- looks at that, looks up at the building -- he says, "Oh, okay, you can walk across."

(JB): John and I played bridge together, and I used to take him and we'd had lunch on Mondays.

(JE): Okay.

(JB): And we walked him back there, you know, he suffered from macular degeneration, so he couldn't see very well. And he had to have someone with him most of the time to get him where he's supposed to go at the end.

(JE): If I can just say again, he kind of had a rough exterior and many of us in the community were intimidated by him. So when I was going to interview him, I was very intimidated. And, it turned out, he gave so much to the interview that when we finished the interview, he said, "Well, sit down; let's talk."

And we'd been visiting already for an hour and a half and he wanted to talk some more. And I was so impressed with him and he was a World War II hero himself.

(JB): Oh, yeah. He was on Iwo Jima.

(JE): Yes, he was, he was. And I always think about this term he said: "There's a point where you come, you just have to be a fatalist." Because his life could have been taken at any moment. And along with Henry Bellmon; and both of them served at the same time, and both of them survived to be great leaders in our city and state. And that's enough of me talking now, this is your interview. But it's fun -- it's fun to discuss these...

(JB): It is.

(JE): ... these two great men.

Chapter 7 – 3:30

Education

John Erling (JE): And then you endowed the Brock International Prize for Education and Brock Symposium for Education in 2001. And you organized Tulsans for Education Excellence. Kind of tell us more about that.

John Brock (JB): After I had made enough money -- more than I needed -- I started trying to figure out how to help people. So we started identifying people who had made great contributions to education, and then exposing the politicians and the education community in our state to those advancements that they had made. We've been doing this since 2001; and our most recent one was this spring. We inducted Saul Khan of the Khan Academy into the Brock Prize. And I think he has made the greatest education contribution in the last 100 years.

(JE): Hmm. And who is he?

(JB): He is a Bengali, or at least his parents were Bengalis, and they emigrated to the United States. He was born here. He's an engineer, his niece called him and said she needs some help with math. And that gave him the idea to create a computer program to help people with math. Now you can take any course you want to, remotely, on his program, and he's all got all sciences and, and other courses -- the greatest help of anybody that I

know of. And if you ask an OU or any engineer for that matter, if they know about it, and they say, "Well, I couldn't get out of school without it."

(JE): Wow. Yeah. And that's great. And continuing on your interest in education: I think you've endowed chairs at OU, OSU, and University of Tulsa. That true?

(JB): That's right.

(JE): Does it frustrate you to think and wonder why doesn't everybody get on this bandwagon of education?

(JB): It frustrates me and many other people. The most important thing we do in this life is educate our children.

(JE): Right.

(JB): And we're not doing a very good job of it right now.

(JE): Is it really strange why we're not? What are your thoughts on that?

(JB): Well, culture has changed. A lot of things have changed and we are still doing the same thing we did 100 years ago. I think the teachers union is partly responsible for this. We're inflexible in our education these days. We're making little headway. But it's slow and painful because I think I had a wonderful education. I don't have any problems with what I learned in the schools I went to. They were just terrific but you can't say it anymore.

(JE): I just wonder if we've -- the state of Oklahoma -- has funded education the way they should have not just currently, but going way, way back; because we are near the bottom in the United States.

(JB): I know. I'm tired of hearing that we are.

(JE): We are.

Chapter 8 – 7:00
Politics

John Erling (JE): You had a fun club. You called the Other Other Club. Tell us about that.

John Brock (JB): Well, I read a book called Comrades and it was the story of friendships and one of the friendships was the author of the book and a fellow that had gone to Wisconsin University played football and majored in history there. And that guy had a hero in Churchill. When Churchill was a young man, first in parliament, Parliament was known as “The Club.”

So he was liking good food, good drink, good conversation, formed “The Other Club.”

Now, the fellow from the University of Wisconsin said, “Well, that’s a great idea. We’ll just form “The Other Other Club in Wisconsin,” which they have, and have been doing it for many years. I liked the idea, so we formed it here in Tulsa, “The Other Other Club of Tulsa.”

And we meet once a year for a dinner celebrating Churchill, with the Churchill scholar that speaks to us, and we do it every November near Churchill’s birthday.

(JE): Many years ago, I attended one of those, as a matter of fact. Randy Foutch, who you know, invited me to that. So that’s fun. And that’s still going on, isn’t it?

(JB): It is. I don’t run it any longer but it’s being well taken care of.

(JE): Yeah. For many years, you wrote guest editorials for The Tulsa World.

(JB): I did.

(JE): What was your subject matter? What were you writing?

(JB): Well, whatever infuriated me at the time (Chuckling). And I did it for 30 years and they almost always printed it until recently. They won't print my editorials anymore.

(JE): Okay, and why is that?

(JB): I guess I'm just ... have the wrong ideas for them.

(JE): Alright. So then let's go into that a little bit. Would you say you're on the conservative side of life in politics?

(JB): I... yes. I think most people would think so. I consider myself a half-conservative and half-liberal. But I think I'm a moderate.

(JE): Oh! (Laughing)

(JB): But I'm a fiscal conservative and a social liberal. So I would write editorials to that effect. And the last one I wrote, it was condemning hatred and the programs we have instituting hatred in this society we're in now. And apparently that was a no-no for the paper. And they haven't printed one since.

(JE): But you said programs -- like what programs? You're saying that hate is promoted?

(JB): I think we call it "woke," you know? I think the "woke" programs are instituting hatred and they're making people resentful, unnecessarily. I think we ought to spread love and kindness and reject hatred and resentment.

(JE): Okay. So let's do a lay of the land. We're in 2023, heading into this big election -- presidential election -- in 2024. And we have President Joe Biden has announced he's going to run again. The former president, Donald Trump, has announced he's running. And right now, today, on this date, June 28th, Donald Trump is leading the primary candidates for Republican nomination by quite a healthy margin. And Ron DeSantis is considered number two at the moment. Let's tell people what we have

here. We have President Biden, whether you agree with his policies or not, is considered elderly. He's young for you, but he's 80.

(JB): He's not all there anymore. It's hell to get old and he's old.

(JE): And he's like 80, 81. You know, he would be 86 or so when he finished his term of office.

(JB): Yeah, but he's not well now and I don't like the looks of either side.

(JE): And so then Donald Trump, why don't you like the looks of him? Because he isn't that much older. I mean, younger, he's only four years younger, but he's very vibrant. There's no question.

(JB): I think he's compromised himself. And, you know, I thought his policies while as president were okay. His character is not what it should be to be the President of the United States. I don't think he can be elected. So I'd like to see both of them drop out of the race. I don't expect to see it but I think nothing good is going to happen to this if they're both in.

(JE): Yeah, because the President, former President Trump has had, what, 2 indictments? Faces 3 more, perhaps. And you just wonder how long that's going to continue on. Our history has never seen anything like this. And a man who can be indicted and then raise more money for his campaign after each indictment.

(JB): I think people are really put off with our politics today like they've never been before. They think he'd be better than the alternative.

(JE): Well, either -- both sides feel that.

(JB): Yeah.

(JE): We've got a character issue and you've got an age issue.

(JB): That's right.

(JE): So, what are you gonna do? You're gonna, you know, you flip a coin or whateve?.

(JB): Of course, I think you got a character issue in both cases, and age issue issue in both cases, too.

(JE): Yeah.

(JB): I think we ought to start with somebody new.

(JE): Who would that be?

(JB): Well, I like DeSantis, or ...

(JE): Well, neither one are going to drop out. We know that.

(JB): It doesn't look like it. They might drop dead! (Laughing)

(JE): Right. Biden will be the candidate, but Trump is not assured of being the candidate for sure.

(JB): No, but it's pretty sure.

(JE): And at this point, we have Chris Christie coming out and he's really going after Donald Trump.

(JB): Yeah.

(JE): So we wanted to add that to the mix here. So you and I sit here: we don't know, but a couple of years from now, they'll be listening back, and we don't know. So we don't know, you know?

(JB): Apparently the Democrats have a better system of selecting a candidate than the Republicans do. And the flawed system that Republicans have pretty well assures us that Trump's gonna be the candidate.

(JE): And I guess we'll leave it there for now because that's all we know. That's all we know.

Chapter 9 – 3:53
Rules for Leadership

John Erling (JE): You have put out a book, Rules For Leadership: Life and Career by John A Brock,” and tell us what this little booklet is about and what you do with it.

John Brock (JB): That is a summary of the notes that I've used in my lectures at the Oklahoma University Engineering Leadership class. We talk about leadership in there, and then I talked about the family rules for living -- Brock family rules for living. And, finally, the last part of it is how to get a job and how to get ahead once you get it. These are just the rules. If I justify the rules, it would be 500 pages and nobody would read it.

(JE): Right. And I just opened it up here to the middle and the job interview says, “Always smile before, during, and after the interview.”

(JB): Yes.

(JE): And that is important to...

(JB): It's important. People like smiling faces and they don't like grouches.

(JE): And, you know, you've been smiling through this interview. So I think you're hired. Anyway... And then ... so then you give these booklets.

(JB): That's right. I have 40,000 of them in print -- still have about 2,000 of them in inventory. And I give them to the students that I lecture to, all the boy scouts that make Eagle Scout get one, the all-state scholars. People used to buy them as gifts for graduating seniors. Occasionally, I'd sell 500 for someone who's going to buy them for their graduating class in high school.

(JE): So when I ask you, what advice do you give to young people? It's in this book.

(JB): It's in the book.

(JE): But kind of summarize and verbalize what you would say to a graduating class today.

(JB): I tell them if they read the book and follow the rules, they'll have a happy and prosperous life. And, of course, you need to be a person that respects everyone, is kind, is generous, works hard, and does the right thing.

(JE): What are you most proud of today?

(JB): I guess I'm pretty proud of that book, for one thing. That's been a very successful thing.

(JE): It has. Have you had people read it and come back to you?

(JB): Yes, all the time. People say, "I've still got this book on my desk. It's, you know, 20 years old or pretty close to it." And I've had several people say, "This changed my life," and that really touches me.

(JE): Oh, yes, indeed. Right. Look at the power I'm holding in my hand right here. That can do those kind of things.

(JB): 26 pages and you can read it in a half an hour. And people take it to heart.

(JE): They'll internalize that. Yes, indeed. Well, I admire you for that. How would you like to be remembered?

(JB): I'd like to be remembered as, yeah, I wrote those rules.

(JE): Yeah.

(JB): I think that's -- and I believe that -- if you follow the rules, you'll have a happy and prosperous life.

(JE): Yeah. You know, that's from a man who's a successful oil person and became wealthy and all, and it's not that -- it's this book I'm holding that you're most proud of.

(JB): Yeah.

(JE): Yeah. Alright. Well, I thank you for sharing your life with us. You've affected a lot of people through your business and through this book. So you're to be admired and you ought to think well of yourself.

(JB): Well, thank you, John. I appreciate it. Coming from you, that's a real compliment.

(JE): Alright, thanks. I appreciate your time.

(JB): I appreciate you.

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