



# Nancy Sevenoaks

Daughter of James C. Leake, Sr. - OK  
Television and Radio Pioneer

## Chapter 01 – Introduction

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**Announcer:** Oklahoma native James C. Leake, Sr., grew up on the farm his grandfather homesteaded in 1891.

He worked the soda counter at Rickner's Bookstore and Restaurant in Norman while attending college at the University of Oklahoma and, as a trombone player, even took a job repairing the school's band uniforms on a \$10 sewing machine. He became president of the band in 1938 and raised money for trips, where he often slept in the baggage car to protect the group's uniforms and instruments.

In 1940 Leake married Marjory Griffin, the daughter of grocery pioneer J. T. Griffin of Muskogee. He became a salesman for Griffin Grocery Company and, during World War II, played an important role in expediting food shipments for the federal government.

Upon the death of J.T. Griffin, Leake assumed part of the management responsibilities of Griffin Enterprises. With his brother-in-law John "J.T." Griffin, Leake established TV stations in Tulsa, Little Rock, and Oklahoma City. His annual car auctions in Tulsa drew thousands of spectators from around the world.

Mr. Leake was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1979. His daughter Nancy Leake Sevenoaks tells the story of her father on Voices of Oklahoma.com.

**Chapter 02 – 7:30****Land Run**

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**John Erling (JE):** My name is John Erling. Today's date is October 26, 2022.

Nancy, would you state your full name, please?

**Nancy Sevenoaks (NS):** Nancy Leake Sevenoaks.

**JE:** And where are we recording this interview?

**NS:** In our home in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

**JE:** So you're the storyteller here, but yet I asked birth dates and age. Your birth date?

**NS:** I'm an August baby — August 14th in 1951.

**JE:** Your present age is?

**NS:** 71.

**JE:** And where were you born?

**NS:** I was born in Muskogee, Oklahoma.

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

**NS:** Marjory Griffin.

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

**NS:** She was born in McAlester, Oklahoma and moved to Muskogee when she was approximately five years old with her family as they moved their business, Griffin Grocery Company, from McAlester to Muskogee.

**JE:** Any idea why that happened?

**NS:** Because the roads were better and the better train system was there at the Muskogee depot and it was all about getting the food to all of the rural areas in Oklahoma. The roads were not very good at that time and transportation was the key, and they did it either by semis or they did it by train.

**JE:** What was her personality like?

**NS:** She was very, very fun. She was very curious and she lived her life to the fullest. She was a curious person, very happy all the time — singing, smoking, and drinking. (Laughing)

**JE:** (Laughing) But not to excess?

**NS:** Not to excess, but to fun.

**JE:** To fun. Right. Well, then, we're here, then, to tell the story of your father and your father's name?

**NS:** Was James Chowning Leake Senior.

**JE:** I gotta ask about the name "Chowning."

**NS:** "Chowning" is one of the oldest names in the United States. It comes from a Thomas Chowning who came over in the 1600s and settled in Virginia, and all of the Chownings — or any compilation of that word — they all have been traced back to this one man who came in the 1600s.

**JE:** And then your father, Senior, was born when?

**NS:** He was born in 1915. My mother was born in 1918; and Daddy was born in 1915 in Chandler, Oklahoma on the land that was homesteaded by his great-grandfather in the land run of the late 1896 era.

**JE:** And your father died when?

**NS:** Daddy died in 2001.

**JE:** And he was how old?

**NS:** He was 84 years old, I think — right around there.

**JE:** But then his father — did you say homesteaded in the land run of 1872?

**NS:** His great-grandfather; they went on horseback and he had all of his money in a money belt around his pocket. He had gone back to England — they were, of course, from the United States — had gone back to England, made \$600 in gold coins; came back, had it wrapped around his waist in a money belt, and did the land run on horseback and pulled the pin for a piece of property four miles, approximately, from what is now route 66 just on the outskirts of Chandler.

**JE:** All right. And so that's your father's —

**NS:** Daddy's grandfather.

**JE:** Grandfather.

**NS:** Yes, sir.

**JE:** And weren't they from — were they from Illinois?

**NS:** Only for a short — they had been from the south because they were Chownings and they had gone back to England and came back and stayed with relatives in Illinois, and then came down to the land run. They homesteaded on the Sac and Fox Indian reservation.

**JE:** Then on his mother's side, then, they came from where?

**NS:** They came from... My grandfather, who was not an Indian — my grandfather, Griffin, J.T. Griffin, came from Mississippi. He was from Houston, Mississippi. But my mother's family, they were Choctaw Indians; and, of course, their family had originally come on the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit around 1836 with the federal government, because their chief was friendly with the US president.

They did not end up on a Trail of Tears like the Cherokees did. They went when it wasn't in the dead of winter, and they settled; they got the lands in southeastern Oklahoma. Hence, she was born in McAlester; both of her parents were in that area. They were from Scipio and all; we still actually have the original allotment that was allotted to my grandmother when she registered as an Indian before statehood — before the Dawes Rolls took effect.

**JE:** Is it true they came to Oklahoma by ox cart?

**NS:** Yes, sir, they did. They came by ox cart. You know, that was a way of travel then. They either walked or you went on something like an ox.

**JE:** (Chuckling) Right, right.

**NS:** And my grandmother on my father's side, Elizabeth Chowning, they came by Conestoga wagon from Tennessee and that's how they ended up in Chandler.

**JE:** Do you have the reed organ that came on the ox cart?

**NS:** Unfortunately, I don't. I'm so sad that we don't have that. That was given to my brother's wife; she sort of majored, I think, in piano and all. So Harriet has that. Harriet Leake.

**JE:** Okay. But it came in that ox cart.

**NS:** Yes, that's correct.

**JE:** So, your father — education.

**NS:** Well, they were farmers. Like Daddy always said — I asked him about the Great Depression — he said, "We didn't know that there was a Great Depression where we lived; everybody farmed, they had enough food for themselves and for others."

But the people that were moving west would come through, wanting work, and Dad would tell them: "I don't have any work for you, but you can stay as long as you want. We've got fresh water and you can dig what you

want to eat." — such as the potatoes and other vegetables and they had that — but he grew up dirt poor on a farm.

His mother, my grandmother, Elizabeth Chowning Leake, she was the school teacher in a one-room schoolhouse four miles down the road, literally right at Route 66. It's now gone, but she taught all 12 grades and he went to school there. Then he ended up in Davenport, which is not far, but transferred to Channeler High School and graduated from there in, like, '35 something like that. And then he went to the University of Oklahoma and loved it. He loved school. He was, he was always secure. Both of my parents were very, very curious people.

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### **Chapter 03 – 8:08**

#### **Big Jim and Marjory**

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**John Erling (JE):** While he was at OU, he was the equipment manager...

**Nancy Sevenoaks (NS):** Yes.

**JE:** ... of the band.

**NS:** Well, he had on account his horn that he played. He started — of course, they all played in school when they were in Chandler — and he paid \$2 a month on it. And I think it cost \$50. I have some of the receipts from that still. He kept that stuff. And when he got to the university, of course, didn't have any money. All of his siblings were back home and he had two brothers and his sister and his mother — my grandmother, Elizabeth — [She] always said, "If we can get Jimmy off the farm, he will help get the rest of you off the farm." That was her goal. And so Daddy took every job he could get. He always did dry cleaning. He worked as a soda jerk. They got a chance to go to the Orange Bowl in Florida — the band did.

And, so, Daddy said, "Well, you know, we don't have any uniforms."

There wasn't anything; that was a very desperate time. And none of those kids had ever been out of Oklahoma. They'd never seen or done anything.

He said, "But if you can get me a sewing machine, I'll make all of the uniforms for the band," which he did. And I still have his sewing machine.

**JE:** He made the uniforms?

**NS:** Yes, he did. (Laughing)

**JE:** Isn't that amazing?

**NS:** I won't say they were probably the finest ones, but everybody on the farm knew how to sew — you had to, you know? And in those days and times everything was handmade. And, so, yeah; he made all that and he kept that sewing machine. Both he and my mother were very accomplished seamstresses and they did a lot of sewing. My mother did all sorts of handiwork, which she passed on to me. I was very lucky with that as well. So, yeah, but he had a great time. And that's how he met my mother. My mother —

**JE:** Right. But let me just say —

**NS:** Okay.

**JE:** You said horn? What kind of horn? Trombone or ... ?

**NS:** I think it was a trombone. I can't remember. I have it in his bio someplace.

**JE:** All right. And then he — didn't he sleep in the baggage car to protect the uniforms?

**NS:** Yes. Mhmm. (In agreement) Yeah. Well, it was the band equipment because that, you know, if you pay a dollar a week or \$2 — I mean, a month — for and it takes you months to buy something, you don't want someone to steal that from you. So, yes, he did.

**JE:** Right.

**NS:** And he had a little car; and it was an American Austin Bantam, which he painted cream and crimson for OU, which we still have.

**JE:** Wow. So we're talking about what years now?

**NS:** 35 through 40ish. 39-40ish. So about 5 years. He wanted to be a doctor. But then, with the war, and with all the stuff that was going on.

And he met my mother, which was a marvelous story because he was working as a soda jerk and my mother was a Pi Phi down at OU. And they sat next to each other in a class because no one was between L and G. And that's how it comes.

So he thought, "Well, the way to her heart is to bring her fresh orange juice when she comes down on the steps of the OU house — the Pi Phi house — and that's how he won her heart was with fresh orange juice that he would squeeze.

**JE:** Man. Little did they know what they were starting.

**NS:** (Laughing)

**JE:** And if some — nobody would be able to point them out — but some of the trees at OU were planted by your father, James Leake Senior, on the WPA program in the 30s. Works Progress Administration.

**NS:** That's exactly right.

**JE:** He planted trees there.

**NS:** Mhmm (In agreement)

**JE:** They're amazing. Amazing. Alright. So then let's — James. Did he go by James?

**NS:** Jimmy. "Jimmy" or "Big Jim."

**JE:** Okay. So can I call him — what should I call him?

**NS:** You can call him either one you want; either Big Jim or Jimmy. He was happy. He always said, "Just call me. I don't care." And, you know, everybody misspelled/misspoke the last name. They wanted to call it "leaky," "leak," lee-ack-ee," all sorts of things.

And I said, "Daddy, they're mispronouncing your name!"

And he said, "I don't care." He said, "As long as they call me."

**JE:** Exactly. Right. It is interesting, the spelling, L-E-A-K-E. Does that come from out of — why wouldn't it be L-A-K-E?

**NS:** Yeah. I know. Isn't it weird? I think it's English, is what I think. I think it came — I think that they were originally Welsh, that side of the family.

**JE:** Right. Alright. So then the marriage of Big Jim and Marjory. When? Back in 1940 or ...?

**NS:** 40, they got married. I've got that picture if you want to see it, too.

**JE:** So, then, because of that marriage, he gets to know her side of the family; and her side of the family was already established.

**NS:** Very well established. It was JT Griffin and his brother, Charlie, had moved to Oklahoma just before statehood.

**JE:** But it was the grocery business.

**NS:** They established the grocery business which is a whole another very, very interesting story.

**JE:** It is; but then Big Jim went to work.

**NS:** Yes. And, really, I believe that Daddy was a born-and-bred salesman is what I think. I think he was born to be a salesman and I think he could sell anything to anyone. And, so, he just pulled his britches up and he started selling for my grandfather, JT Griffin.

And when they got married, they wanted to expand Griffin Grocery; so Daddy and Mother moved to Dallas and to the warehouses down there — because, remember, again the roads are not good at this time — so it's either rail or truck. So you have little warehouses in all the little towns where you would store your product to put in the grocery stores and all. And they were expanding that business.

And then, of course, we had the war break out and my uncle, John Griffin, my mother's brother, had to go into the war. Daddy was not allowed to go in. He tried. He tried desperately to enlist but he had a type of glaucoma and they rejected him several times.

So then he was put in charge of getting enough food out for everybody during these war years. I have lots of letters of his where he's trying to get product, and he sent salesmen out trying to get coffee, and finally they had to go to New Orleans to try to get coffee so they could have coffee that they could vacuum seal and put out for sale.

And they had crops that they were growing. The crops all around Muskogee and areas for your spinach, your corn, your green beans, all of that. And there are letters that he would send to my Uncle John — not knowing if Uncle John Griffin would get these letters — that would be four and five pages; and he kept copies of every letter he ever wrote.

And these would be like, "John, I tell ya that the corn came in well and we got a good crop and we have it all put up. But the spinach was no damn good and I told them just to plow it all under and we'll do it next year," and he would report on the strawberries and the fruit. So this went on for very long. Very interesting stories on that.

**JE:** Yes, well he played a key role then during World War Two. He was actually working for the federal government at that time, wasn't he?

**NS:** Yes. He was.

**Chapter 04 – 7:11****J.T. Griffin**

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**John Erling (JE):** Then the time comes that JT Griffin becomes ill.

**Nancy Sevenoaks (NS):** Yes, he was ill; so Mother and Daddy moved back to Muskogee to oversee everything that was going on there. And John, my Uncle John Griffin, was overseas and Daddy and Mother spoke about this so often to us children when we were growing up, because mother and her brother — John Griffin — their mother had died when my mother was 13, 12 or 13, her mother died of spinal meningitis. So she was sort of the head of the household with her Daddy all those years.

And he became ill when the war was over. I have all these letters that Daddy — that's when he started writing all of our legislators that were in Washington, trying to get Uncle John released from service to come back to help gear up the company again so that we could produce more vegetables and more canned goods to go out.

And Mr. Griffin, my grandfather, had told them — he was a brilliant man also — and he had said, "Well, the best way for me to sell my groceries is to own some radio stations."

So in the thirties, he bought these radio stations and then he'd advertise to buy Griffin's preserves, and Griffin's coffee, and Griffin's mayonnaise, and Griffin's mustard and all this. So he had those, but he said "The coming thing will be television." And he said, "You must get into television."

**JE:** But it was radio he was in first?

**NS:** Yes, radio first.

**JE:** Right, right. And so that's JT Griffin that had that kind of vision.

**NS:** He was a very, very, very smart man. I never got to meet him. He passed. My brother, Jimmy, was the only one born when grandfather Griffin died.

**JE:** You said your brother. Let's name the children of Big Jim and Marjory.

**NS:** Okay. My oldest brother Jim — James C. Leake Jr. — he passed away two years ago, not from COVID, just just passed away in his sleep; and he was a lawyer but did not really practice law, he was a gourmand. He was, like my parents, very interested in diverse areas.

Then we have my brother, John Griffin Leake, who was a TV man and he ran our television station over in Little Rock, Arkansas: KATV television.

And then my sister, Jean Leake, and Jean was two years older than I. And she died; she died at 39, and that was in 1988.

And then my brother, John Leake, died when he was 43 and that was in 1991; and they died of cancer. And she had gone to school and gotten a degree. Both John Leake and Jimmy Leake both went to the University of Arkansas (Pig Sooie!) and Jean went to OU, but then transferred out to the University of Arizona in Tucson to join me in college. And she went on to get a degree at Le Cordon Bleu; and then she went on and got another degree at Sotheby's Institute for Fine Art, and her specialty was antique silver.

**JE:** Wow.

**NS:** (Laughing)

**JE:** So you're the only one left standing, aren't you?

**NS:** I am. (Laughing)

**JE:** Yes; you are.

**NS:** Yes, I am. And in very good health.

**NS:** Very good health. I'm very happy.

**JE:** I'm taken by voices and your voice is so big and strong. Was Big Jim's voice big like that?

**NS:** Yes. Mhmm (in agreement). Very much. Both my parents had strong voices but I'm often mistaken when I call on the phone for a man.

**JE:** Oh, I'm sure.

**NS:** (Laughing)

**JE:** And listen to that laugh; that's very attractive. Okay, well, let's talk about — there's many businesses, but since I'm a radio guy, let's talk about radio stations. So, the first radio station, then, would have been what?

**NS:** I don't really remember how many, because, if you remember, they were scattered around. None of these had a large area of distribution because of the size of the towers and all at that time.

**JE:** So what stations did they have?

**NS:** KOMA in Oklahoma City. KTUO Radio in Tulsa, and I'm sure some several other smaller ones around.

**JE:** And so they had those radio stations. And then, because your grandfather had the vision for television —

**NS:** They started on that; they started on television. They knew what they wanted, they got Uncle John back, and I will say that in business — which my mother, and my uncle, and my father were in business together over 50 years — they never had an argument because they all were of the same mindset.

My uncle was a very quiet man, but very determined and knowledgeable and knew what he wanted.

So they started in trying to get tv stations and they applied for a license in Muskogee; and it was opposed by a family in Muskogee that wanted it for themselves. We were granted the one in Oklahoma City for KWTV; one in Little Rock, Arkansas for KA Television; and the one in Muskogee which was KWTV, I think, or something, I can't remember the call letters right now.

And, so, the key was — the hard part — was getting the metal to put up the towers because this is the end of World War Two. All of the metal had been used during the war. And Daddy found a — I have a letter where he said, "Well, they said there's a tower on the ground in Pine Bluff, Arkansas." And they would go around and they would find these — they scavenged them — and then they put three television stations on the air in nine months.

Channel 7 in Little Rock was the first, then it was Channel 9, and then Channel 8, and the strongest one was, of course, Channel 9 in Oklahoma City, it was the capital city of the state. CBS was the #1 TV station. This is 1953, so there isn't a whole lot of content on air. There was a lot of blank screen on air, but that one was immediately. ABC was the third major television station to go on the air — that was Leonard Goldenson that had put it on the air — and it took a while for it to really gain its strength and in the late sixties and in the seventies is when it came on gangbusters. But all three stations did well.

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## **Chapter 05 – 11:05**

### **8's the Place**

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**Nancy Sevenoaks (NS):** K TUO television was originally down on old Boulder Park. I think they call it Veteran's Park.

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

**NS:** And the small building is still there. It started in Muskogee and Don Woods was there and Jack Morris was there. I remember them, as a very small child, and they were in Muskogee and we had it. And the building, I believe, is still standing; it was a grocery store on the east side — I think a Whettles Grocery Store — for a while.

But the goal was to always move it to Tulsa, which is where it should have been all along. But they had this fight with one of the other families in Muskogee trying to keep them from getting the license. So once they got

the approval, they moved it to Tulsa, "KTUL," for "Tulsa" and there remained.

**JE:** So Don Woods came from Muskogee —

**NS:** He and Jack; I remember from when I was a little child.

**JE:** But then Jack Morris moved to Channel 2.

**NS:** Mhmm (In agreement). And that happens — and that back and forth — and remember his famous end every time was, "Do you know where your children are?"

And I remember when I was a child color TVs were just coming in, and I remember, I was sitting there and somebody asked Daddy: "Do you think this color television thing will really catch on?" Because color TV was so much more expensive than a black and white. And somehow that always stuck with me as a small child when that came up. I thought that was, you know, I didn't understand it, but I kept that in the back of my mind.

**JE:** Yeah; and you talked about in the fifties and all. Remember when we just sat and stared at the test pattern?

**NS:** It was the test pattern. And, oh! I mean, when it was time for Sky King or Mickey Mouse Club or one of those to come on... Howdy Doody — all four us kids were just glued, sitting on the floor, in front of a television.

**JE:** And the tube was round.

**NS:** I wish we kept some of those old TVs, but Mother would have said, "Now you just don't keep those, Jimmy; they're just old, you know, where are you going to keep all that stuff?"

**JE:** Right. But then, you know, here in Tulsa and Channel 8. They were the primo TV station; because I remember when it was "8's the Place."

**NS:** "8's the Place." Boy, I tell ya.

**JE:** And they were cooking then.

**NS:** They were.

**JE:** They had Don Woods and I'm trying to think if they were stars.

**NS:** It was — it was Don Woods and it was Bob Howard.

**JE:** Yes!

**NS:** Barbara Allen was one of them.

**JE:** Yes.

**NS:** And Chris Lincoln was the other; and "Zeb," as we called him, Carl Bartholomew was — I was lucky enough to work for him. And when I came back to Oklahoma, that's who I was lucky enough... Tommy Goodgame was the general manager. He was absolutely a brilliant, brilliant general manager because one of the things he knew how to do was to leave people alone that were creative.

Carl Bartholomew was just unbelievably, as you well know, you knew Carl very well. He was one of the most creative men. I remember I was working, he told me at the time, he said, "Now when you go to bed, always keep a pad and a pencil by your bed, because when you wake up in the middle of the night, you might have an idea, but it will flee if you go back to sleep."

So he came in with a little piece of white paper and he said, "I have this idea for this campaign that I want to do, and he said, I'm gonna call it '8's the Place.'"

We called it a "bulge box 8" as our logo, and then he just put out there "the place." And I thought, "Well, you know that, okay."

I didn't have that imagination, you had to leave it to a genius like Zeb. And so we called him "Uncle Zeb," because he also did the children's show in the afternoon, Uncle Zeb's, because we always did a live children's show because we felt it was important to connect with the community. And you

would have 20 to 30 children on and they had Mr. Zing and Tuffy was the first and then you had Uncle Zeb, and Cousin Zack, and Cousin Zeke and all of this, and it went on for years and years and years and they would have cartoons, and then every kid got to be in front of the TV and say hello. And all the kids in town loved it.

And, anyway, he started in with these ideas and it just ballooned and we had more fun doing "8s the Place." I was honored to be there at the ground floor and to be there for some of that creative ability that I was able to soak up from such a brilliant man.

He was a very unassuming person — very tall, very handsome — his wife and his family couldn't have been more supportive and it was just to bootstrap them, "Let's get this girl, we'll put her in a bathing suit, we'll have her walking on the beach."

We were, by the way, at Keystone and he said, "Let's put a portable TV in her hand," they don't even make them anymore. She was walking on the beach in a yellow bathing suit like this and there were people running around and all sorts of stuff. And I have shown that to many, many people and subliminally we put that TV — not one person even realized there was a television in it that she was walking down the beach with a TV in her hand. So we had a lot of fun. We had hang gliders, we had boats, we had sailboats, we had Daddy smoking a cigar with an "8's the Place."

My parents — he said to me, "You know, I'd really like to paint the bottom of a pool."

And I said, "Well, I'll just go ask Mom and Dad if we can drain their pool and paint it. Well, yes, they said they thought that was just a wonderful idea. So they Max Abney come, and he free-hand painted the bottom of that pool, filled it back up with water, we got all these girls in bikinis and kids in the pool, swimming, and had a big tall crane that shot the photos and Mother and Daddy are sitting in chairs, waving, as he pulls into the, "8's the Place."

And he said, "It is so great that you have so much..." And people would send us — this for an idea: We had people that wanted to parachute out of a plane and form an eight for an "8's the Place."

So they're still online and in a lot of places, a lot of those promos, but it was a great deal of fun. We had it was a fantastic, fantastic — and they're still, they try to revive it every now and again, but not with the success that it had in that original one.

So I was lucky enough to be part of that; and I have to say that Tom Goodgame gave him his head and Daddy gave, you know, "You need something Zeb? You let me know, we'll do it on an antique car, we'll do it wherever you want. We can get whatever you want."

So he had a tremendous amount of support from management, but also from the community.

**JE:** Oh, yes, It's rare that a TV station can dominate like that.

**NS:** Well, hold on, don't forget that we were a local television station because Harold Stewart had sold Channel 2 and he was local at the time, but they sold him to the big companies. So Channel 8, Channel 7 and Channel 9 were all locally owned, and so we could put our fingers on the pulse of the community. It wasn't just the Tulsa area, it wasn't just Oklahoma City. It, you know, we put up the largest at the time, the largest tower in the world when we put up that the tower outside of Coweta at 1909 feet up.

And then the highway patrol put their communication systems on it, the police.

So we had — it was a multi-use tower and then, of course, it came down in that big ice storm that we had just (crashing sounds); it was too much ice on it. But they rebuilt it.

**JE:** You know, and something else that in television we don't have today is those four personalities.

**NS:** Yeah, that core personality.

**JE:** You just don't have that today, that there isn't any one big one or anything but Bob Howard was like a movie star; he was very good looking.

**NS:** And he was a wonderful man.

**JE:** And then Barbara Allen who was very, very attractive.

**NS:** Sensational.

**JE:** She was from Bartlesville, I believe.

**NS:** Oh, that was — that was Diana Moon. That was from Bartlesville. Beautiful girl, married to Ken Adams, Boots Adams' son.

**JE:** Did Barbara Allen leave and then Diana Moon came in?

**NS:** Yes. And then Diana Moon came in and don't forget Beth Ringel I'm sure you remember.

**JE:** Right. Right.

**NS:** Yes and Beth was a beautiful girl. But they all meshed well and you had such marvelous personalities with all of 'em. Even with Don Woods, with his Gusties in all over town and you see Gusties framed on a wall at restaurants and businesses and you know, because they became part of the community, they became part of the heart.

And my father, he never went to bed without watching the news at night. He watched it every single night and he was on the phone as soon as the news was over talking to the GMs.

**JE:** Oh, really?

**NS:** Yeah. Mhmm (in agreement).

**JE:** Because ...

**NS:** Well, if he liked it, if he thought it needed this, if they didn't do enough, he wanted local, local, local, local, local stories. He wanted them to cover bowling because there were people that bowled; he wanted him to cover

this and his famous quote was — Chris Lincoln said to him, “Mr. Leake, how'd you like the quarter horse run?”

And he said, “Well, I thought it was good, but it needs to be a little longer.”

**JE:** (Laughing)

**NS:** You know when they did the race. Chris can tell stories about it. But those were genuine, really wonderful people that were part of this community, all of them. And loved the community and loved everything in it.

**JE:** It was wonderful. And I came in '76.

**NS:** It was a golden era.

**JE:** It was a golden era. And, so, what do you think it spanned? 70-something to 80? What do you think?

**NS:** I'd say at least because the TV was going strong, everybody loved television. Cable was in its very infancy and everybody loves cable. But, honestly, I don't think there's that much more really. I mean you pay a lot more but back then it was free. I love certain things on TV now but it's a lot more complicated. Then it was very easy and a very interesting time.

**JE:** Well, those of us who got to enjoy Channel 8 back then...

**NS:** We were so lucky, weren't we?

**JE:** Absolutely. No question about it.

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## **Chapter 06 – 11:45**

### **The Car Business**

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**John Erling (JE):** Then, of course, your father is in many businesses.

**Nancy Sevenoaks (NS):** Yes.

**JE:** Let's put it that way. But let's talk about the car business.

**NS:** (Laughing)

**JE:** She laughs because ...

**NS:** I laugh because it's overwhelming. Okay. So, my dad was able to buy a car for \$75 and when he went to the University of Oklahoma — it was a little American Austin Healey in 1935 or something like that. These are little bitty cars: two-seater, open, of course, painted at crimson and red for OU.

And then when he finished college and married my mother, he got a car in the grocery business. He gave that car to his brother so that they could also go to OU. And then when they graduated he took that car over to Little Rock, Arkansas and that car — every day at four o'clock — Bozo the Clown would drive it out and he'd jump out of that car for the Bozo the Clown Show that was live on air in Little Rock at KATV every day.

And then it retired and sits in our garage at our office at this time. So, but, because he was born on a farm, you had to be a mechanic, you had to be able to fix things: your tractors, your this, your that.

So Daddy loved anything that had a motor, he wasn't interested in sailing, he was interested in a cruiser. He wasn't interested — he wanted a car, he wanted an airplane. And he was lucky enough, when he was a child, that he was always interested in aviation. And so there was a company or a man that came through with a plane and for a certain amount of money you could go up and take a flight in it.

So Daddy had to do it, he just had to do it. Well then he started; he would help the guy get people so that they would pay the five cents or whatever to go take a ride around. So they did that. And he always said he was gonna get a plane one day. But the kids, when my uncles, my aunt, my dad, when they were done with all their chores on the farm, they would sit there by that old stone school, right on the corner of what later became Route 66 — at that time it was a dirt road — and they'd watch the cars passed, and they count the cars, and what kind of cars, and they were

gonna buy — gosh, one day they were going to get one of those cars. And Daddy always said he was going to have a car.

And so they finally, of course, as life goes on, his dad managed to get a car. My grandfather Leake had worked for Magnolia Oil Company all of his life. 12 on, 12 off until Roosevelt put in the 40-hour work week. And he was a farmer like they all were. And Daddy, as a salesman, would go from place to place and he'd see an old car sitting out there and he'd say, "What are you gonna do with that old car?"

And they'd say, "Well, I don't know; this old piece of junk..."

And Daddy said, "Well, I'll give you X amount of dollars for it," and he'd take it to the Griffin warehouse nearby and he'd just park it in there. Well, then as transportation became better and train service and trailer service became better, you didn't need as many of these warehouses. So they started consolidating all these little towns that had these little warehouses and he had to get rid of these cars.

So Mother said, "Now, Jimmy, we're just not gonna bring all those cars and just set them in the yard up here."

And, so, Daddy thought, "Well, what am I gonna do with these?"

So he came up with the idea. Well, it was in '64, so I don't know how old I was at that time, but I wasn't very old and they said, "We're gonna have an auction out on this piece of property we own out on Shawnee bypass in Muskogee." We had a building out there.

And, so, he gathered up his cars and he said, "Well, we've got to find somebody to do it."

Nobody had done an auction of cars, antique cars, or old cars at that time. And so he went over to England and he got a auction house, Parke-Bernet, to come over here; it's now Sotheby's Parke-Bernet; I don't even know if they keep the Parke-Bernet anymore. And they came over.

And, well, first it was, I think, Ward Landigan may have done the very first

one out of New York and he came, and on the back of one of the Griffin's Groceries flatbed trucks, we were just out in the grass.

And I mean we had made — Mother had us sit at night and we made hamburgers and froze them. And then that day we had people cook the hamburgers and a couple of us ran the soda fountain; we had soda fountain things set up, and chips and different things. And we had our first auction in 1964 and everybody, of course, worked — it's a family business, you have to work. And I have some pictures of it. And some of the people who became lifelong friends of my parents came over from Europe for it and everything because they wanted those beautiful, old cars that were not worth anything and that day Daddy sold three. He sold a Duesenberg and two Accords and made \$10,000 on the three of them and he said, "My gosh, I have tripled my money."

And so we counted the funds from the concession stand and we made \$640. And we went, "We are so rich! what are we gonna do!?"

And we all looked at each other in the house and we all said, "Let's go to Mexico!"

So my brothers got in a four-door Lincoln — you know with the suicide doors? We had we had three of those and they drove down, we just said we're all gonna meet in Acapulco. And, so, because Daddy had become friends with J. Paul Getty and there he had a resort down there in Acapulco and we were gonna go stay there. So we took the time. Mother had loved bright colors and he had bought her a hot pink '54 Cadillac, a hot pink limousine.

My sister said, "Thank God we were young and didn't know enough to be embarrassed," but the brake fell and it ran into the lake. So he had to get a new one, so he got a lipstick-red Cadillac limousine — a 1964, I think; they had a sort of pointed fins on the back.

nd we drove from Muskogee, Oklahoma all the way down, we stopped in in Mexico City and then we went on to Guadalajara and then we went to Taxco and then we went down to Acapulco where everybody met up and we all had a great time down there and that beautiful red Cadillac.

But he'd gotten the bug as a small child. Even when we lived in our first house, or my first house, on Boston, he would come home with an old fire truck and he'd say, "Everybody get on board the fire truck, we're gonna drive through town!"

He'd run that siren on it and then the police came and said, "You just can't drive around town."

And — a fire truck — people think there's a fire someplace; we were all hanging off of it. So he always had a car, you never knew what you were gonna drive, what he was going to take you to school in. It could be '54 Chevy or it could be a Rolls Royce but he came to love Rolls Royce for their mechanics.

And so in '64 he gone over. He said, "Marge, I'm going to go over the sale over in England and I'm not gonna buy anything, but I'm just gonna look." And so over he went.

And about four days later, Mother goes in for breakfast and there in the front page of the newspaper is a photo of my father with his hands over his head and standing in 1911 Rolls Royce built for the Maharaja of Mysore, who used it to hunt tigers in India.

And he had bought it; it said, "Highest price ever paid for a car at auction of \$24,000!" And daddy has his hands up like this. All the men are in pork pie hats, you can just see them there in their thin ties and everything; and he brought this car back and documented when they unloaded it and all of this, that car ran like a dream.

But that became the love of his car. And he, at one time, had the largest private collection of Rolls Royces in the world and he loved those early Maharaja cars, but he loved all early cars. He loved steam engines, he loved the Stanley Steamers. We'd raced those in England for years in the Brighton Run. ABC did two sports programs, "Emmy goes to Brighton" and when they documented an Irish guy or Scottish guy, he was wonderful.

Anyway, he's driving Emmy from London to Brighton and that was always

the first Sunday in November and it celebrated the repeal of ... there was this act when cars first came out, you had to have someone walk in front of the car to announce that the car was coming so that it wouldn't scare the horses that were driving people in carriages.

So they call that "The Brighton Run" and cars have to be completely vetted to show that they're accurate, real, they don't have part — you can have new old parts on it, like if you have a problem with the car — but Daddy and Mother went that first year and fell in love with that, fell in love with all the people they met. They got into a whole circle over there of dear friends that lasted for life and that started them on this tremendous journey.

And Mother bought some antiques because it was revenge for buying that car. And so then she said, "Well, I think we can just ..." They decided they were going to open a museum in Muskogee because he had so many cars. So we opened it on the side of the very first car auction we had in '64 out on Shawnee Bypass and they called it "Horseless Carriages," then we changed the name later but it was fun. And we had the cars and then the gal who was helping us run and said, "Well, I think you can sell, like, postcards and knick-knacks for the kids that come through."

So then Mother said, "Well, as long as we're doing that, we might as well have a gift shop and an antique shop."

So then we would buy this stuff in Europe and bring it over every year. And we had this very big business of antiques, mostly English and European ...

**JE:** Furniture?

**NS:** Antique furniture, silver, everything, paintings, whatever you can think of. We had it in that store and then we had a little gift shop. So their curiosity took them on tangents.

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**Chapter 07 – 7:12**  
**1911 Rolls Royce**

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**Nancy Sevenoaks (NS):** Then my brother, Jimmy, came along in the seventies and said, "I have this friend, George Supes, who wants to sell his business." It was The Razor Clam. So we bought The Razor Clam. And I eventually ended up working with Ricky Kamp there because I had just gotten finished going to the Le Cordon Bleu like my sister did; and so that was great fun and he was a wonderful person to work with.

**John Erling (JE):** Yes. And we all remember The Razor Clam located on...

**NS:** It was right on ... they thought the city was going to move that way. I guess, George Supes, I don't know how, he picked the building that was on 21st and there's a car dealership there — 21st and Memorial. And it is on the northeast just over ... now it's some other building now, it's a little odd-looking building.

But, at the time, it was the only really gourmet ... we didn't have liquor by-the-drink then, you know? It was all bottled — brown paper bags with bottles — and it was gourmet food. We had it flown in once a week from the east coast. The fish was all flown in. My brother, Jimmy, went to Chicago and bought, at auction, fabulous wine. So we had an incredible wine cellar that you wouldn't believe. Ricky was a great impetus in that restaurant for gourmet French food.

**JE:** That's Ricky ...?

**NS:** Kamp. With a K. K-A-M-P.

**JE:** And does he still — he's still in the restaurant business?

**NS:** He has just retired, a little, but Ricky and I are still great friends. I see him. He comes, again, from a food family. You know, they owned the famous Kamp's Grocery Store in Oklahoma City, and he's been in the business, really, all of his life as well.

**JE:** I got to put in a word about that 1911 Rolls Royce.

**NS:** Yes.

**JE:** I understand it was reviewed by Queen Elizabeth on the occasion...

**NS:** I have a photo. Mhmm (in agreement)

**JE:** ... on the occasion of the 25th anniversary.

**NS:** Yes.

**JE:** Was that classy a car?

**NS:** Yes, it was that classic. And my brother Jimmy, my sister Jeane, and Daddy went over for that and they were on the review stand and went by the Queen.

But the interesting thing about that is we were doing a commercial for the museum and the antique shop and all. So I said, "Daddy, let's do it in the 1911 Rolls Royce because you're so famous for this car. You're known really all the world over." He got ... I have one whole file drawer of clippings that people sent from all over the world who did not know my father, that sent this clipping that made the papers in their countries.

But, so, he is in the Honor Heights Park and he's in this Rolls Royce and he's driving it. And so the crew... so we've got a mic, the car, and do all this stuff, and they said, "We don't need to mic it. The car is so quiet that we didn't even need to put a mic on it."

And Daddy just drove. He's driving, he looks over and waves his hand and he says, "Hi, I'm Jim Leake. This is a 1911 Rolls Royce built for the Maharaja of Mysore. Come see this and more cars at my museum in Muskogee, Oklahoma!" And he just peels out and drives off. You could put a glass of champagne on the hood of that car and it wouldn't make a ripple; and I understand it's now in the far east and sitting — it just is so sad — sitting on marble pedestals on top of a fountain in an interior building.

And, you know, Daddy was a big believer — as am I, as was my brother — that you should drive the cars. Maybe not a lot but you need ... these are not pieces of art. These were things that we use. Now, you need to respect

them and take care of them. But Daddy drove every car all the time.

He's like — Jay Leno's like that. Jay Leno has that beautiful museum out at Burbank airport. And he can walk in and I've seen him do it. I've been there a couple of times. I've seen him walk in and get in a Stanley Steamer and just peel out and drive off into LA traffic. Great. It's great; it's fun.

**JE:** Here's a historical 1954 Humber Pullman limousine, a gift from Lord Rootes to his lifelong friend Sir Winston Churchill.

**NS:** Yes, and it had a special ashtray in the back for his cigars — extra long — and then the seat would slide forward so that Sir Winston could get out of it ... out of the car easier.

And we had that for many, many years. Daddy bought it with one of his best friends, Bill Hayes, out of Muskogee and they had more fun with that car. We still have ... I still have one in my back —in my garage — a 1970 Cadillac Deville convertible that Daddy bought for Mother new at Christmas in 1970, but he had special paint. Because she liked red interior with a blue outside, and so — painted outside — and so he said, "I've just got to get a big bow to put on it so that I can present it to her on Christmas Day."

So he went to Joanne Stewart, Harold Stewart's wife. Now Joanne, who was the epitome of taste in Tulsa, had the most marvelous store in Utica Square called Les Marquee. And so he said, "Do you think you could make me a big bow?"

So she got this big bow and we put it on the car. Well, when I went out and saw that car on Christmas Day, I went "(Gasping) I have to have that car!"

Well, Daddy wouldn't sell it to me for the longest time. He kept it. We mostly used it in parades. So then he said to me, "I tell you what, Nancy, I'm gonna give you that Cadillac you've always wanted."

And I said, "Oh, Daddy, I'm so excited, I can't wait! And so I said, "Oaks! Daddy has given — finally said — that he's gonna give me that Cadillac and he told me I didn't have to pay him anything for it!"

And Oaks got this look on his face and he said, "That's because I had to pay for it!"

**JE:** (Laughing) Okay. Now we entered the name "Oaks."

**NS:** Yes.

**JE:** Who is "Oaks?"

**NS:** Oaks is my husband, Richard Sevenoaks. We call him "Oaks" here; I do, but you can call him Richard or Oaks, either one.

**JE:** And your husband had a close relationship with your father?

**NS:** Very close. He was his mentor. Daddy was a mentor to many young people, both male and female. We had people that came and lived with us that — youngsters, my friends, several of my friends, lived with us when we were growing up if they were having issues at home or whatever. They, you know, my parents, would just say, "By gosh, you all come over and live with us for a while until things work out."

I don't know if people still do that, but they became lifelong — almost second — children to my parents and I can name so many people that way. So we were very blessed in that.

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## **Chapter 08 – 12:00**

### **Leake Car Auction**

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**John Erling (JE):** That first auction in Muskogee lead to other auctions.

**Nancy Sevenoaks (NS):** Yes.

**JE:** So let's follow that trail.

**NS:** Okay, so we had that first one in '64 and then he built his collection back up and he said, "You know," he said, "I want to put in a museum down in Arlington, Texas." So he said, "We're gonna call it 'Wings and Wheels Over Texas.'"

And he had some airplanes he hung up; and we had these cars, and my sister, Jeanne, was instrumental. I was in college at the time. And so we had an auction down there and it's in that area in Arlington where they put a lot of, oh, I think there's an amusement park there and different things like that. But back then there was absolutely nothing.

So he put it in, and we had this first auction; and I was in school and he said, "Now we need some people to work. See if you can get anyone that would like to come to Dallas and we'll pay their airfare here and they can come and stay for the weekend and we'll pay him a little money" he said, which it was. "And they can work this auction."

So I said to my friends, "Would any of you all like to go and work at a car auction?"

Of course no one knew what the hell I was talking about. So Oaks said he would go and a couple of other people did. Well, yes, they thought that would be fun. So we went and we had this auction and, again, er had a lot of people from Europe because those beautiful — what I call the "heavy iron," the thirties, forties, those beautiful Packards, beautiful Duisenbergs, wonderful cars. Plus Daddy loved the early ones like the '03 Fords and the Wynton's and all of those.

They came over for it. We had a marvelous time and that was the first auction, I think, Oaks ever worked. So that was pretty early in; and we've had two auctions. The first one we had was at Dallas at the fairgrounds — at that old fairgrounds. We had it there first but then we moved it to Arlington for the second one.

And then Daddy said, "You know what? What the hell?" He said, "Why are we doing this here? We have one of the finest buildings in all of the world located in Tulsa, Oklahoma." It was called the IPE Building at the time. And he said "It's the largest free-span building in this part of the country." And

he said, "Let's just have the auctions there."

So we turned it over, and we started hosting the auctions there, and let me tell you: they loved it. It was all indoors, it was all dust free, it was all climate controlled, it was secured. It was a fantastic building. It was run well and has been through these many, many years and we were in there until we sold the company — we had it. And it was our flagship auction that we held once a year there.

**JE:** Right. And so we're talking years — that's?

**NS:** Like '73, '74, until we sold the company in, what? '17?

**JE:** In 2017?

**NS:** Yes, mhmm (in agreement)

**JE:** And who bought the company?

**NS:** It was bought by this company out of Canada called Ritchie Brothers, R-I-T-C-H-I-E. Ritchie Brothers. And they are in the heavy equipment and mostly it's all online stuff. And they're worldwide — biggest one in the world.

And they wanted to get into the collector car business because it was making a lot of money. So they had approached us — one of a number that had approached us — to buy it. And the minute they bought it, they said, "Well, you know, we don't really like the way you do business. We think, instead of having four auctions and appealing to the \$40,000 to \$120,000 car person, we want to have it all no-reserve and we want it to be just like Barrett Jackson, but we're gonna be better than Barrett Jackson and we're gonna do this and that the other and we're going to focus on one or two auctions a year."

And then it collapsed on them. And they had a couple of auctions, they weren't good; and then COVID came and it was a marvelous excuse to get out of the business.

**JE:** Wow.

**NS:** I believe, I don't know. And nothing's been done since then, but, you know, they bought us for one purpose; but then the people who came in — they brought in some additional people to manage it — and they wanted it to have the same footprint as Barrett Jackson. And that was not really our clientele. Our clientele was more of the, I would say, anywhere from \$15,000, \$20,000 on up to \$200,000 to \$250,000; that's where we were.

**JE:** But Barrett Jackson, of course, is very successful.

**NS:** Very. Very. We went to the first sale he ever had out in Phoenix, and it was on the corner of Camelback and — what they called at the time — Rural Road.

Mother and Daddy came out, I was in school. Jeane and I, by this time, were both in school at the University of Arizona and Daddy took out a couple of cars to sell, and became very good friends with Russ Jackson and Tom Barrett, which we all did. Because it was early. I mean, there was a very small unit that was interested in this at that time. And so we became friends with all of these early people — Bill Hera and that group — you know, we all hung out together. And by that I mean my parents did and, by attrition, those of us who were interested in the car business would filter along.

And so we went to that first auction and Daddy had one of the cars he took was a boattail Rolls Royce that was copper body. By "boattail," It comes back to a point in the back like it's a boat. And people kept touching it, we had to frantically before it went across the — we were out there buffing that sucker trying to get it to shine so. Because every time you put a fingerprint on it it would blossom into a tarnish.

So, we had a lot of fun and that was very, really beginning of it. And they were both brilliant men and they had marvelous taste both — Tom Barrett and Russ Jackson — and they had wonderful taste in cars. And the cars that were being collected then were turn-of-the-century on up into what I call the "heavy iron": the Duisenbergs, the Rolls Royces, the thirties, the forties, the Packard's the Chords, the — I hate to leave out names because

somebody would be yelling at me about it, but, you know.

And, at that time, cars of my generation were just considered used cars.

**JE:** Yes, right. I noticed that Roy Clark — who I've interviewed for VoicesOfOklahoma.com — he had quite a car collection himself.

**NS:** Yes, mhmm (in agreement).

**JE:** And let's talk about this because this goes back to an auction — the story's in 2019 — that some of the cars he had: a 1963 Pontiac Bonneville, Safari station wagon, '77 Lincoln Continental, '61 Plymouth Fury, '72 Jeep CJ5. Those are some of the cars that he sold.

**NS:** Oh, yeah. Lovely.

**JE:** This brings back memories to some people. In that auction: a 1961 Porsche, '35 6B-1600 Router Cabriolet — that's out of my league.

**NS:** Yeah!

**JE:** But I was a Ford and Chevy kinda guy. But he had a '60 Chevrolet Corvette, Chevrolet Bel Air, Packard Woodie Wagon 1948, and we can go on and on with these, of course, but these wonderful cars...

**NS:** And now it's a business! You know, it's television and they have all sorts of knockoff shows which are wonderful for it. And I will say this: When you have someone, and I think this is one of the things that both my parents liked, is they were small town people and they didn't care if you were in a ritzy car or in a old car, you know?

Remember the car Jack Zink always drove? You know, it didn't look like much, but it had the engine in it that would take you from here to the moon. Anyway, if you saw someone in, like, a mechanic zip-up, he could be Bill Hera or he could just be Joe Blow that has two cars and you never knew. And Daddy always said, "You gotta get down and scratch with the chickens," meaning you had to get down with the real people that were there and he was just as happy sitting in the shade under a tree talking to

some mechanic as he was to the president of ABC, Leonard Goldenson. He was just as happy.

**JE:** And that's what made him so unique.

**NS:** Well, he was interested. Like I say, I was lucky. I had two parents who like to have fun and they were very, very interesting people. He loved cars, he loved boats — he liked old boats. Like, we had a 1948 Owens. It was about a 40-footer, wooden boat and then we had a Chris-Craft, a 53 Chris-Craft that was beautiful. We kept those on Fort Gibson Lake.

And he and my Uncle John had dug out the area that they wanted for their boat docks before it was all filled in so that they'd have a deeper channel there. And then Uncle John had his boats there; and Uncle Bill Ray had his boats in the house there; and we had our big boat there. So he liked those boats and he loved airplanes. We always had a plane, flying.

**JE:** Back to the auction. You and your husband Richard — “Oaks.”

**NS:** Yes?

**JE:** By the way, where does “Sevenoaks?” ...

**NS:** It's English. It's about 30 miles outside of London. He did his ancestry over there and it's about 30 minutes outside of London, very close to Chartwell, which is where Winston Churchill's home is. And it's a small town — well, probably not so small now — that a foundling was found under an oak tree and he went on to become the Lord Mayor of London and that he was named since he was foundling nor an orphan, they gave him the name of “Sevenoaks” because of the seven oaks there; and there's a big manor house there and everything.

And we went back with his parents one time and they had us on the front page of the paper. (Laughing)

**JE:** Alright, so... But you and Richard, you took over the auction.

**NS:** Yes. We always worked the auction, and I worked it from the very first one on.

**JE:** But then —

**NS:** And then we took it over from Daddy, but he still worked with us because he had to keep his fingers in the pie. And we had a barca lounger out at the office and we had a big partners' desk, it's still there. And Daddy sat on one side of the partners desk, and Oaks sat on the other side, and they would "work the phones," as they called it, and they would call people and they would go out on sales calls and they made, actually, a marvelous team. It was wonderful because of the way Daddy was a natural salesman, you know that's what he did. But he also, more than that, is he understood the cars and the love for the cars. So it was just a special passion of his. He drove a different one every day.

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## **Chapter 09 – 6:18**

### **Aviation**

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**John Erling (JE):** Did he have an office at KTUL up there?

**Nancy Sevenoaks (NS):** No.

**JE:** He never ...

**NS:** He never did, m-mm (in dismissal). He never had an office and he never tried to micromanage the stations. But by gosh, he was in a lot of contact with the three station managers at the stations.

**JE:** Even in the peanut business, wasn't he?

**NS:** Well, we inherited that. And so that was down in Denison, Texas. And my brothers would have to go down in the summer and work at the peanut company and they made peanut butter and peanut butter products. It was never successful as what I would say, but my dad, once he got his teeth into it, he tried and tried and they were so relieved when we finally sold it.

And it was right there in Denison, I remember going down, it was in the old way down before they got the new highway and you passed the building before you just went over the viaduct.

**JE:** But then aviation was really... Was it as big a part of his life as cars?

**NS:** At least.

**JE:** Oh, really?

**NS:** Yes, he was passionate about it and when he had first taken the ride in that plane, his dad didn't want him to go up. My grandfather did not want Daddy to do it. But Daddy talked his way in, and of course both of his brothers ended up working as mechanics or whatever during the war on airplanes.

But Daddy knew that it was a time machine. I've got ... He used to tell us many, many, many times that an airplane... but it was more than that, really, to him. But he said an airplane let him spend an additional number of nights at home with his family that he would normally not be able to because with businesses in Oklahoma City, and Tulsa, and Little Rock, and having to go to New York to lobby or to go to California or go up to Chicago for this or that and grocery business or whatever they were doing.

So he learned to fly very young and my mother said that their first plane, she just sat on a — there wasn't a real seat in the plane — and she sat on a parachute when they would go up and he had some canvas-coated planes. And, one time, they took one of those planes — we would go over to see my grandpa over on the farm and he'd call and say "Dad, we're gonna fly over." And grandpa would go out and in his car and move the cattle out of the way and we would just land right in the field there and then we'd go in and have fried chicken lunch or whatever we were doing.

And I remember one of my girlfriends who was staying with us at the time, I said, "Mary you wanna go over to see my grandpa?"

"Yeah!" She thought that was fun. And so we were, I think at that time, maybe in an Aero Commander. So we went over and we started coming

down. I saw she was gripping the armrest real tight and she said, "Are we crashing?!"

I said, "No, we're landing in the field."

I hadn't even thought about it, you know because we'd always landed in the field. But, in the early days, they had landed in the field and they'd gone in — I think it may have been before my time — and the cattle had gotten back in and they ate the canvas off the wings. So they had to borrow my grandpa's car to get home.

But he had that and then ... And my Uncle John Griffin was a pilot. My brother, Jimmy, was a pilot and my sister Jeanne got her pilot's license, and I flew with her. But we flew everywhere and he was so — such an addict — for it that he'd get up, he'd say, "Marge, let's go to lunch up at Western Hills." Well, Western Hills Lodge in Fort Gibson is probably a 30 minute drive from us.

And Mother would say, "Jimmy, it'll take us as long to get in the plane and get there as it would to drive."

But back in the 60s they had put in an airstrip up there. So Daddy wanted to make use of that airstrip. So we flew all the time. We flew everywhere. We'd fly to Dallas, we fly all over the states. We flew to Mexico a number of times. When he was older, we made him get a co-pilot.

But my Uncle John also did the same, but then we started using the plane to — like tapes had to be over at Oklahoma City from the TV station. They'd fly it over if they had short on time or to Little Rock they'd fly it there because they were big into sports and they had these big — these really big — units that they would do remotes. Remember when you had to do remotes? And they had these big — really sort of like motorhomes — and they would fit them out and they would go and cover the games in Little Rock and Fayetteville and the games at OU and OSU.

And so that we were all over the this part of the country doing that kind of things. And the planes at that time were fairly inexpensive way. We already had them. We were using them. And it was just a way of life. I remember

flying from the time I was it's one of my first memories. One of the first smells I ever remember was getting in a hot airplane when you first opened those doors and you can — there's a special, I can't tell you what it is — but I remember we'd say, "Let's leave the door open, let it air out a minute."

**JE:** Well, did he have a collection?

**NS:** No, he usually just had one that — he only had one at a time. My Uncle John was into King Airs. Daddy really loved the Aero Commander. We had one crash but it was just our pilot, Jimmy Stevenson, that was in it who was one of my father's best friends. And we think he had health issues and that he just —

**JE:** He died in that.

**NS:** — it went in. But after that one, we had several Aero Commanders. Those are the ones I remember the most. And then we went into King Airs, which is what my Uncle John Griffin also had; and he had King Airs and he just loved to fly. He was happy to... You know, the people that do that, I don't know if you know him, they just hang around airports and someone says, "I'm going here today."

"Well, you need someone right along with you?" And they just hop in the plane and; go you went all over.

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## **Chapter 10 – 9:45**

### **Community Involvement**

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**John Erling (JE):** You can comment on some of these things because beyond his businesses, he was involved in our community.

**Nancy Sevenoaks (NS):** Yes.

**JE:** He served as chairman of the Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art.

**NS:** Passionate about it.

**JE:** He really was.

**NS:** Absolutely passionate. He would be so happy to know what Gilcrease is doing now. And when it came up that TU was going to be involved, I said, "I am so sorry, my father's not here to see this because it is this is a great thing. Just to get it more exposed." He promoted it everywhere.

**JE:** And we should say that here it is, in October 2022, They tore down the Gilcrease museum building and they're building a brand new one.

**NS:** Yes. It's exciting. And I think it's marvelous.

**JE:** It is. And then he was with the Will Rogers Memorial Commission.

**NS:** He was — that was a special baby for my father, and they got all of Will's books reproduced again, republished. He worked with Reba Collins there for 30 years. They built onto the building and he had Roon Arledge, who was the head of ABC, come and do the inaugural for the new building, which is now not a new building anymore. But became very good friends with Will, Jr.

And so we used to see Will a lot who looked just like his daddy.

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

**NS:** And he had a place in Tubac, Arizona. And when Mother and Daddy would come out to Tucson to see us — it's an artist community between Tucson and Nogales — and we would sometimes go by there if Will was there. They owned the ranch, I believe, maybe, right on the border as well. I don't know if any of that there, if it's any of my business, but I just remember that from years gone by. So it was quite, again, a passion product if you know Will Rogers was a great aviator, he was a great Oklahoman; and he was a salt-of-the-earth kind of a person. And so that was very interesting to my father as well.

**JE:** And then your father won the American Heritage Award for the Gilcrease Story.

**NS:** Yes.

**JE:** Tell me about that.

**NS:** Well, he decided this stuff needed — much like what you're doing right now — needed ... these stories needed to be told. And we had the most wonderful person that worked at Channel 8, Bob Gregory. One of three brothers who were in the broadcast business who were passionate — some of the most fabulous men that ever came out of Oklahoma. They have not been touted properly in my opinion. But Bob Gregory was a wonderful storyteller. He was a wonderful writer. He was very curious. He had a marvelous personality.

**JE:** Voice. His voice.

**NS:** His voice was just, like, oh my goodness.

**JE:** Yep. Yep.

**NS:** And so he and Daddy started talking about this. And, again, Tommy Goodgame, you know, pushed this through and they did the Gilcrease story. Then they decided they needed to do the Oil and Oklahoma series, which included different tribes and all. And they had these different programs on.

And then they took it from there and decided to do a companion book for it, which Richard, my husband, "Oaks," went around to all the small towns and sold the book to all different stores and all the when — it was one of his first jobs after we got married in '77. And then it just went from there. It was, you know how those things just spiral forward. And they did a lot and that's how he got J. Paul Getty, he got the last interview with J. Paul Getty.

**JE:** Who did?

**NS:** My father did, and my mother, and everybody went over to Sutton Place, which was the home that J. Paul Getty owned in England and did the story on him. And one of the questions that my father asked him — because there had been a notorious kidnapping of his grandson — I don't know if you remember and they cut off his ear.

**JE:** Yes. Yep.

**NS:** Daddy said, "Well, the word is you're having all this work done at Sutton Place and I'm just — they say that you installed a pay phone because people needed to make phone calls."

And he said, "I did that because they were making all these phone calls to all over the world and I was paying for him."

And he said "Well, tell us about, you know, your grandson who had his ear, you wouldn't pay the..."

He said, "If I paid that ransom, every member of my family was in imminent danger because the next one would be kidnapped and the next one would be kidnapped and I found that, you know, they always sensationalized that in the news. But, so, he has that last interview with J. Paul Getty and I have photographs of it, and of course, we have that in our archives at our office, which I would like to get out sometime and get."

**JE:** And I'm looking at this picture of your father with J. Paul Getty.

**NS:** Yeah.

**JE:** You have it sitting right in front of us here. That's pretty amazing. Absolutely amazing. And then they got the Chicago International Film Festival Award for the E W. Marland story. E W. Marland was the governor of the state of Oklahoma. So he did that story, the Edward R. Murrow award for the "The Five Civilized Tribes: The Unfinished Journey."

**NS:** Isn't it incredible?

**JE:** It is. For all the things that he touched.

**NS:** He just started and he was an Oklahoman, and he wanted to promote Oklahoma, and that's how he did it. He just kept — he was lucky enough to have the ability to surround himself with people who were very creative. Bob Gregory has to stand out; Carl Bartholomew has to stand out; there are a lot of them. I don't mean to not mention others, but those two were standouts who really made a major impact in the television business in the late sixties through the seventies and the eighties in particular.

And Bob ... I went with Bob; we were doing the J. Paul Getty the story. And, so, he had to go, he wanted to go to Pompeii, because they were going to do this museum in California which became the Getty Museum. And J. Paul Getty had been greatly impacted by Pompeii. And so we had to get special permission from the government of Italy to go to Pompeii to film. And Bob Gregory, we went down there and we did that story and then he came and he filmed The Brighton Run. He stayed over with the crew and we did the Brighton run again with him.

**JE:** I've had the good fortune to have been around some of these people. Bob Gregory and I, he wanted to take me to lunch and I've forgotten why, but he listened to KRMG.

**NS:** Yes. Everybody listened to you.

**JE:** And Bob — I was honored that he was interested enough to take me to lunch. Tom Goodgame, he loved everybody in town. But — I don't know where it was — I would bump into Tom and he would always visit with me about the radio station and all that. They were just great people. So I feel fortunate that I came when I did.

**NS:** Connected.

**JE:** And I could kinda relate to some of the people that you're talking about. You know, about J. Paul Getty, they said that when he lived at the Mayo Hotel, he put a pay phone outside his apartment — and he did that there as well.

**NS:** That's why he had money. (Laughing)

**JE:** (Laughing) Did I — I got to ask the question about faith. Did your father have a faith?

**NS:** Yes.

**JE:** Did he talk about God?

**NS:** Yes he did — all the time. He often quoted the Bible: "To whom much is given, much is expected." And he sort of lived that way. Because he knew he had come up from a kid that was in high school and didn't have shoes to wear to school, like all of the other kids in his class, up to you know whatever he really wanted to do.

He was, of course, you know, in those small rural towns, you were limited by what churches were there and he was a Baptist. My mother had grown up as a Methodist and they were very involved with the St. Paul's Methodist Church in Muskogee. And when her mother had passed away, they had donated the organ to the church. Well, that church burned down and they built another one.

But we were lifelong Methodists in Muskogee and Daddy became a Methodist and went gung-ho over that as well. But, yeah, he was very, yeah, he was. He was great friends with Oral Roberts.

**JE:** Oh, really?

**NS:** We put Oral Roberts on the air.

**JE:** You did?

**NS:** Yes, Channel 8 did. He had not, you know, he was a revivalist.

**JE:** Evangelist.

**NS:** Yes, evangelist. And had tent revivals and all and he had a real following. And Daddy and Oral became friends, and Oral had wanted to get on TV and so Daddy was trying to get him to get on; and we had a friend that

helped us out of here and we got him on the air and put him on. And then they put in Boston Avenue Church on the air.

**JE:** So he — your father — put Oral Roberts on Channel 8?

**NS:** Yes.

**JE:** His program.

**NS:** Yes and Barry Switzer and OU football.

**JE:** Right.

**NS:** Mhmm (in agreement)

**JE:** So was that the first time Oral got on television?

**NS:** I think it was. Now, I'm not sure, but I know it was the first time he was on our station. Because, you know, Sunday morning was all religious television.

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## **Chapter 11 – 5:00**

### **Pallbearers**

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**John Erling (JE):** What traits of your father do you admire as you look back on him?

**Nancy Sevenoaks (NS):** Curiosity and love of people would be two of the big ones. He and my parents were not at all snobbish in any way or they didn't feel any certain things. They just were curious people who like to have a good time. They like to know new things and find things that were going on; enjoy people. They were always learning something. It's very interesting.

**JE:** I'm sure you've acted on those things yourself.

**NS:** Yes. Mhmm (in agreement). And my family! You know, I have a daughter, one who is an antique appraiser; I have one who is a school teacher; one who is in wholesale clothing. So they, I mean we, you know, we spread the gambit, it's fun.

**JE:** And I'm sorry, I didn't ask you about your own children.

**NS:** Aww, that's alright. I have three girls — Oaks and I do.

**JE:** Let's name them.

**NS:** We have Audrey Sevenoaks, who is a school teacher here in town. She did special needs school teaching for many years. Since she's now teaching at a private school and teaching preschoolers. Then our middle daughter is Anne Griffin Sevenoaks. And she's married to David Branski and lives in Calabasas, California. They have two little children, a boy and girl. Audrey has two little girls. And then Sophie Leake Sevenoaks lives here in town with her husband, Luke Lawson and they — she is in the antique appraising. She went to Sotheby's school for her master's and postgraduate after that. And her husband moved here with the Kaiser. He's from Texas originally and he moved here with the [unintelligible] remote. Isn't that fun? They were living in New York for many years and they moved back here during the pandemic. So we're blessed to have two out of the three here.

**JE:** That is great. Well, your dad died, then, July 3rd of 2001.

**NS:** Yeah, and you know, 4th of July was his very favorite holiday.

**JE:** Oh, is that right? I suppose... I had a list of the honorary pallbearers ...

**NS:** Yes.

**JE:** ... at the funeral, and some of these people we know and some — and you may want to comment on some. Rich Atwell?

**NS:** Well, he's a wonderful friend of ours from Fredericksburg and a marvelous car collector and has been a very dear close friend of ours for many years.

**JE:** Camp Bonds?

**NS:** Camp Bonds from Muskogee. Yes, these were all people that we grew up with.

**JE:** David Boren.

**NS:** David Boren. Daddy was very close to David.

**JE:** Oh, really?

**NS:** Very close.

**JE:** Big supporter of him them?

**NS:** Yes. Uh-huh (in agreement).

**JE:** Politically, was he a Democrat? Republican?

**NS:** He was a democrat, honey. He was from the middle of Oklahoma and, of course, at that time, everybody was a Democrat.

**JE:** That's true. Peter Duncan?

**NS:** Peter Duncan. His wife, Linda was my sister's best friend. He's from South Africa and he's the most marvelous man. They live in Oklahoma City and he was two-time Olympian for the University of Oklahoma. This is Peter Duncan. He's from South Africa and came up to swim for OU and they live in Oklahoma City. That's a whole 'nother open barrel of monkeys right there. They're fabulous.

**JE:** Right. There's so many names. And, of course, Tom Goodgame would be an honorary...

**NS:** Right.

**JE:** Jack Morris.

**NS:** Jack Morris.

**JE:** Dale Nicholson?

**NS:** He ran our station in Little Rock, Arkansas.

**JE:** Mike Norman?

**NS:** Oh, he was a marvelous judge out of Muskogee.

**JE:** Mike Rafter?

**NS:** Yes. Again and from Muskogee.

**JE:** Scott Robinson?

**NS:** He ran the port in Muskogee.

**JE:** Alonso "Slick" Smith?

**NS:** Oh, yeah! Have you ever heard of Slick's Restaurant in Muskogee?

**JE:** Yes!

**NS:** Oh, my goodness! Yes! He had a little — he had a barbecue place that he rented from us. And on New Year's Day, every year, he would bring a greasy brown bag with all the ones that was his rent for the year. He paid a year in advance because he was afraid Daddy would raise the rent and he was the same age as my mother. We called him "Slick," but and he was Hollywood's best friend. Hollywood was a gentleman that worked for us for many years. He became a member of our family as well. And Ben Ziegler. Ben "Hollywood" Ziegler. But Slick was a fantastic friend of ours.

**JE:** Harold Stewart who, of course, would be part.

**NS:** Well, they were best friends.

**JE:** Right. Wayne Tatum?

**NS:** Yes, Uncle Wayne Tatum we called him. He ran the boat docks and worked at the grocery company in Muskogee.

**JE:** And then John Wilson?

**NS:** John Wilson was a dear friend out of Dallas.

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### **Chapter 12 – 2:07**

#### **How to Remember**

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**John Erling (JE):** How would you like your father to be remembered?

**Nancy Sevenoaks (NS):** Well, just as someone who loved Oklahoma, and loved his family, and loved his country, and wanted to promote Oklahoma; he was big in the Green Country. You know, he was one of the founders of the Green Country — wanted to promote it all the time.

**JE:** He was. And George Nye was involved in that as well.

**NS:** They were very good friends, he and George Nye.

**JE:** But, okay, so George Nye. Maybe, I don't know who named it, but your father really promoted Green Country.

**NS:** Oh, my goodness.

**JE:** And through the TV station.

**NS:** We were able to. It was a launch pad for all of these promotions that you could do for the state and that's what he was all about.

**JE:** Yeah.

**NS:** He was a true Oklahoman; and he was proud to be from Oklahoma; and he was proud of his family; and he was proud of my mother's family. He was a big promoter of women. He always thought my sister and I could do anything we wanted. He wanted us to get an education, he said to us when we were kids: "You've got to get an education because you never know when it will just be you and your children and you have to take care of them — yourself — and provide for your children." So he always was forward-looking.

And I think that the people who liked my father and who were around him a great deal, they could turn to either of my parents at any time for support or help or if you just wanted to vent.

**JE:** Yeah. But I got to thank you. You're so animated and you remember all this. You're a walking history book. Thank you, thank you for sharing this for our present generation and for the generations to come. And you're very entertaining. And I thoroughly enjoyed this.

**NS:** Well, thank you very much. I was hesitant because I wasn't sure, you know, I'm not — I like to tell stories, but mostly on a small basis. I'm not real outgoing in that way, but I've had a lot more fun than I ever thought I could have.

**JE:** (Laughing) Alright.

**NS:** (Laughing)

**JE:** Thank you.

**NS:** Thank you. Thank you so much.