Voices of OKLAHOMA

Ken Neal

From copy boy to *Tulsa World* senior editor and 1991 inductee into the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame.

Chapter 1
Introduction—1:04

Announcer: Ken Neal joined the *Tulsa World* as a copy boy in 1953, and his numerous positions on the paper won him recognition as one of Oklahoma's outstanding journalists. He has been oil writer, church editor, state editor, copy editor, business editor, political reporter, associate editor of the *World* and then Editor. A member of Phi Delta Kappa, a national professional education fraternity, Neal has been recognized for his "outstanding news media contribution to education." Further, he is widely respected for his insightful opinion-page articles, which contribute greatly to the public's understanding of vital issues.

Alex Adwan was Editor of the Tulsa World for many years and Ken pays tribute to him as a wise, well-informed journalist and a very good friend.

In 1991, Ken Neal was inducted into the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame. He was also inducted into the University of Tulsa Hall of Fame and the Sand Springs High School Hall of Fame, the honor of which he is proudest. Listen to Ken Neal tell his story from copy boy to Editor on ***VoicesofOklahoma.com***.

Chapter 2
Copy Boy—9:57

John Erling: Here we are on the 26th day of February 2009. And you are?

Ken Neal: I'm Ken Neal. I'm here to talk about my early days on the *Tulsa World*. Some of the things I remember. Most of them will be trivial but they will involve people. That's what I want to talk about a little bit.

JE: At this point in time, your age is?

KN: Seventy-three, be seventy-four next fall.

JE: And you were born?

KN: Near Mannford, Oklahoma, 1935, in my grandfather's house on an oil lease.

JE: Did you grow up there?

KN: No. My parents were there at the time. They moved shortly after that. We lived at Keystone until 1937, when I was about two. They moved to Sand Springs, Oklahoma, in about 1937. And I grew up in Sand Springs, Sand Springs High School.

JE: And then beyond high school?

KN: I went to work for the *World* in January of my senior year in high school. I was seventeen. My journalism instructor at Sand Springs had a University of Missouri classmate who was the head of the journalism department at Tulsa. His name was Ed Johnson. My old journalism instructor at Sand Springs was named Ronnie Roberson, and he was guy that headed me into this crazy business.

One day he called me and said, "You'd better get over to *Tulsa World*." He said, "They're looking for a copy boy."

In those days, TU had several part-time slots. They directed people to the *Tulsa World* and the *World* would hire students for various positions. There was a copy boy, there was a part-time desk job. There was a part-time oil writing job held by students, so they were looking for a copy boy.

JE: In 1953?

KN: January 1953.

JE: You have a recollection of your first day on the job?

KN: Oh yes. It was a hot day in January, believe it or not. I remember going in. I had on a coat and a wool shirt and it was kind of hot. So I sat down there and visited with the managing editor at the time, a fellow named Lee Earhard. Lee took some information from me, had me fill out a little form, and said, "When can you go to work?"

And I said, "Well, when do you want me?"

And he said, "Well, hang your coat up over there." He said, "We need you tonight." So I hung up my coat because it was hot.

There was a fellow named Charlie Clark who was the copy boy. He took me around, broke me in over the next couple of days. And all of a sudden, as they would say, I are the copy boy. So that was my introduction to the world.

I'll try to describe it a little bit. The old *World* newsroom is on the third floor. It seemed like a big, bustling place. I look at it now and it's about, oh, maybe forty feet wide and maybe a hundred feet long. And the entire *World* operation was there. The wire room was just to the right as you step off the elevators. There were about twenty or twenty-five teletypes in there. Sports was nearby to the south. The Rim, we called it, which was a copy desk, was right out in that area. The receptionist was close by. The city

desk was on to the east of the Rim, and there was a city editor and a copy editor there. And then the reporters were fanned in rows west of their—if I remember right there were two rows of desk.

And you wouldn't believe the furniture in those days. Each desk had a telephone hung on the side of it. Reporters usually shared a phone. Some of the more senior reporters had big desks. Then on back in the back of that was the society section. And then on beyond that was the oil department. Then beyond that was the toilets, by the way. Which played a role in some of the things I did later on. But excuse me, I didn't mean that the way it sounded.

The smoke was so thick you could cut it with a knife. Nearly everybody smoked. I was the only guy around there for years that didn't smoke. All of the returns were yellowed with smoke. The police radios were blaring, typewriters were going, the teletypes were chattering, the people were yelling at each other. It was a regular cacophony.

Adjacent to the newsroom is what we call the composing room, which was where they built and put the newspaper together. There was an entire proofreading department whose job was to take the galley proofs, compare them to the original copy and catch errors.

There were something like fifty linotype machines out in the composing room. Each linotype had what they called a "pot" on it. It was molten lead, so they generated a lot of heat. They generated a lot of smoke. So the composing room was smoky also. There were various other functions in the composing room, but I remember that mostly.

JE: You had Teletype machines, I guess.

KN: We had about, if I remember right, a total of maybe fifteen to twenty Teletype machines. It was the copy boy's job to tear the copy off of each one of those machines. *AP* had a couple of machines, the *UP* by itself, had a couple of machines. *INS* was still operation, *International News Service*, and they had a machine or two.

There were machines that specialized out of Arkansas. There was the Oklahoma machine, the Arkansas machine. We had spares for most of them. You could change a roll of paper—the rolls that went in them, each one of them had carbon. You had an original carbon and then a carbon copy, of course, which produced reams of paper and waste.

There was one machine out of Arkansas for which we didn't have a spare. And you had to change the ribbon and the paper on that machine with it running. Which many times was a real thrill. I remember that. This was during a period when you had paper copy so they were using originally a yellow-looking paste that came in gallon jars. And they kept it down in the basement of the *World* because it really stank. I mean, it really smelled bad. You know, it's like something real sour and rotten.

We had a table in the newsroom and it was my job to keep the paste re-supplied, the paste pots re-supplied, it had little brushes where you would pour it out. And then you

would paste a head to copy and paste copy together sometimes. Every desk had a paste pot on it. Often the paste pots played roles. Newspapermen had been known to throw them at each other. But, uh—

JE: So all this time as a copy boy you say, "I'll tolerate this atmosphere here because I want to write for this paper."

KN: Oh my God, I didn't even think about that, I was just thrilled to death to be there, what I considered really big time, with the newspaper. When I was in Sand Springs, Oklahoma, and man, I was working on the *Sandtonian*. And to get to go over to the *Tulsa World*, I mean, that was, that was newspaper Valhalla for me.

JE: And that was at its present location too now?

KN: It was at 315 South Boulder; the same building. Of course, there's been a new building added over on Main now, but this original building is still there. I think they use the third floor for a break room.

JE: So that's the scene of the way it was back then. Putting a newspaper together is a lot different today.

KN: Oh, man, it was page-by-page, department-by-department. Paper copy all delivered to the composing room sat on linotypes, sat on hand machines. The type was a galley of type, that galleys then were locked into a newspaper chase, a big old page chase, locked up, sent to stereotyping where they made a mat. And then that mat was turned in a circular kind of a jig, and then lead poured into it, making a reverse. And then you'd take two of those, lock 'em on the cylinder on the press, and run it off that way. Quite a bit different than it is now.

By the way, we had a new set of presses that had been installed in 1949. You could see them from Boulder Avenue. You could stand on the sidewalk and see the presses run. It was quite a thing. People would stop and look at the new presses run.

We also had the old presses that they had been running the *World* off on, I guess, since I'm not sure when but they were very old. They were way down in the basement. They were still functional.

That makes me think, we ran three editions in those days. The early edition, which we called the "Bulldog" went to press about six thirty, came off about seven thirty. That was theoretically the street addition. And it was one of my jobs to go down and get the first copies off the Bulldog, take them back up to the newsroom where they started building then what they called the "midnight edition," which went to press, I guess, about eleven, eleven thirty, came off around midnight. And that was theoretically and actually, I guess, was the mail copy or the state edition. The papers that we trucked out all over the state.

Then that edition was reworked, the paper would be remade. The state emphasis would be taken off. Generally the local copy, let's call it, substituted for Tulsa

consumption. The final home, we called it, started running one thirty or so. And they ran off the final copies that were for distribution inside the city of Tulsa, delivery to homes and so on.

Chapter 3
Full Time—6:20

John Erling: so as a copy boy you stayed there for how long?

Ken Neal: I really wasn't a copy boy for very long. I went to work there in January. By about the first of June, the oil writing job, part-time oil job, opened up and Mr. Steen, Sid Steen, who was my idol, to be honest about it.

JE: And his position was?

KN: He was the managing editor at that point. Lee Hard was managing editor when I was hired. Sid was the city editor. A couple of months after I was hired, Lee went to work for Fourth National Bank, as I recall, and Sid became managing editor. So that by June, I had been working directly for Sid as city editor. He was my direct boss as copy boy.

So when the oil writing part-time job opened up, he gave me that job.

JE: What is that? Oil writing job?

KN: It consisted of calling and getting the well reports, individual well reports from all of the companies, typing them up, sorting them according to county, township, range, and location of the well. And then putting together a daily report. Then after we got all the reports we'd figure out what seemed to be the most significant and write what we called a "lead" for it. And that was a daily thing.

On Sunday, we had more than twice as much, I mean, we'd sometimes have two leads and so on. So Sid gave me that job. By the way, I hired in at $27.50 a week.

JE: So you wanted to be a baseball player?

KN: Well, I was a high school baseball player. The little church where I went in Sand Springs had a guy that was a big booster of a little college in Indiana, called Anderson College, up northeast of Indianapolis. He was on me, number one, to go into some kind of religious vocation. He was really upset with me that I went to work for that sinful *Tulsa World*. So he got me a baseball scholarship at Anderson.

So I went up there for a semester, well, I was there for two semesters. But the spring semester of 1954, which was baseball season, of course, I played baseball at Anderson. Then I went back that fall, but all that time I was becoming very, very unhappy with my move and so on. So I came back here to re-enroll in the University of Tulsa for the spring semester of 1955.

JE: But I want to know what position you played in baseball?

KN: Well, a lot of them, mostly the outfield.

JE: Big bat?

KN: Well, let's put it like this, I was a real good kid baseball player. I peaked at fourteen. I was a big hitter at fourteen, but unfortunately, the rest of the guys caught up with me.

JE: Let's bring you back to the *Tulsa World*. When do you come on as a full time employee?

KN: Well, I finished college in the University of Tulsa in 1957. The spring of '57. Sid Dogford made the obit job–I had turned that down. That was another part-time job, theoretically.

JE: The obituaries?

KN: Obituaries, yeah. Frankly, I was making more money in the oil department because I had started a little bit of a service for other cities and I was getting paid something like fifteen dollars a month by about five or six cities. And in those days that was pretty good money. So I calculated it and what he offered me to do obits was quite a bit less than what I was making. And I said, "You know, I can't do that."

Okay, he understood that. But then sometime in August or so, he said, "Look, if you're gonna work at the *Tulsa World* you're going to have to come over on the city side as a general assignment reporter." And he paid me enough to make it worth my while. I sold my service to my successor.

It's very interesting, when I left to go to Anderson, a fellow named Charlie Smith seceded me. And then when I came back I seceded Charlie Smith. Didn't have an opening when I got back so I went to work for the *Sand Springs Leader* for about six or eight months until the *World* opened up. And then when Charlie left I came back to do the same old job.

I went on city-side, let's call it in fall of 1957. I seceded Freda Gold, who was the wife of John Gold who we'll talk about a little later, I hope. Freda was the church editor. So I got churches, what I called the do-gooder run. I covered Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Campfire Girls, Red Cross, what we called the Community Chest in those days, United Way. I still call it Community Chest, much to their chagrin. Just a variety of those kind of things, WMCA. You know, I had a regular run. I'd go over and talk to the guys at the Y, go up and talk to women at the YWCA, which was more fun than the YMCA. So I was doing that.

Then there's a guy that I have on my list here, he's dead and gone so I don't think he can sue me. But it actually happened, I think truth will be a defense here. His name was Walt Finley. Walt was a reporter, an older guy, he was covering the Planning Commission and what we called real estate in those days, which was just a run. He went over to the Planning Commission meeting, we covered that like a blanket. Walt came in from the Planning Commission meeting, dumped his notes on his desk, went out to what we called

lunch, which was about probably seven o'clock, somewhere along there, and never came back. We don't know what happened to Walt that night.

So the desk then began to get really panicked and so about midnight they were calling the Planning Commission director and everybody, trying to get to some kind of story of about what happened at the Planning Commission, so it was kind of a bad deal.

When Walt came in the next day, Sid fired him. And then another fellow, who was my city editor at that time, a guy named Ray Billings, came back to my desk and said, "Say, I need you to help me out."

I said, "Well, what's that?"

He said, "Well, we'd like for you to take the Planning Commission and the real estate temporarily until we get somebody to do it."

Well, I had 'em permanently. I got transferred to City Hall about eighteen months later and I still had the Planning Commission and all that stuff and all the do-gooders and so on.

Chapter 4
City Hall—5:17

John Erling: At City Hall, were there characters you wrote about then?

Ken Neal: Oh yes. James L. Maxwell, Jim Maxwell as we all knew him, had been elected mayor in the spring of 1958. He was thirty-one years old. He was the son of a florist in Tulsa. In those days the Jaycees or the Junior Chamber of Commerce were big political powers and they had really run old Jim and he got elected in '58. I got there in 1960 when he was running for reelection. He subsequently served four two-year terms, was beaten in a bid for the fifth year.

But it was James L. Maxwell was the mayor. My close friend who is still around Darvin Brown, was the city attorney at that point. He had been city attorney under the Norvell Administration, the predecessor. He was one of the first people I met, and my friend to this day, I'll probably have lunch with him Friday. There was a guy named Clark Ford, who is now dead, was a mayor's administrative assistant. That old city commission, the Democrats had swept the Clark Administration. The Republicans swept City Hall in '54. Sid Patters was a street commissioner. And I can name the rest of them, but that's immaterial.

The Republicans were in charge. They were desperate for money in those days, and still desperate for money. But 70 percent of the City of Tulsa income came from water

sales. So the Clark Administration, looking for ways to beef up the income, passed a one dollar a month sewer tax. Which was promptly called the Toilet Tax by the Democrats.

So when they ran in '56, the biggest issue was the Toilet Tax. You can imagine the cracks that went around town. And George Norvell and the Democrats swept City Hall, largely on the strength of the Toilet Tax. So George served one term, '56 to '58, but the same city commission that was in with him was virtually reelected in '58 with Mayor Maxwell as the head.

By the way, the Democrats not only failed to abolish the Toilet Tax, they doubled it in '56, '58. Well, then Mayor Maxwell came in and he had with him holdovers, the Finance Commissioner's name was Fay Young, who was a typewriter salesman. Pat McGuire, who was a big, old, genial Irishman who was a very, very good storyteller and a heck of a nice guy, who ran a tire store, I think, out on East Admiral.

The Police Commissioner Jay Jones had been indicted during the liquor scandal of 1957, and so he sent to prison the Police Chief Paul Livingston was indicted and did a little time too. It was over so-called conspiracy with the bootleggers. Remember we were dry. It would not be a crime today, by the way.

But anyway, those two guys, and then the Water Commissioner was Guy Hall Jr., those characters. They were reelected several times with Maxwell.

So, yes, one of my most memorable characters was a lady named Mrs. Miller. She was the secretary to the Commission. She had been there since 1925, and knew everything about City Hall. I mean, she was just a fantastic person.

B. Jewel, you know, we've got an A. B. Jewel water treatment plant out here. He was still there. He had been there since '26, great man.

Bill Wooden, who was the city engineer and had been there through many administrations, probably since '21 or '22. So they still had those three or four old-timers that really moved Tulsa from virtually the beginnings.

You mentioned who those characters were, I hadn't even thought about them in a while but I remember them very fondly. Bill was one of my favorite people. He was the kind of guy you could call and he'd just tell you what you needed to know. Didn't pull any punches and leave it to you to write it the way you wanted to and never complain of any kind. That was largely the experience I had.

Guy Hall was the street commissioner. My favorite story about old Guy is that we had a fellow in Tulsa named Warren Green. Warren ran for street commissioner a couple of times. He came up with an ingenious campaign thing. He took green spray paint and circled all the potholes and coined the term "Chuck hole Hall." And he came within like seventy votes of beating Guy. Guy smoked a pipe and you could mention Warren Green and he'd damn near bite his pipe in two. It was very funny. Guy was a very, very brilliant man, but would say things when he didn't have to.

They were always trying to get Guy to keep quiet because as my friend Ed once said, "He would just blurt out the truth."

Chapter 5
Court House—5:22

John Erling: From City Hall you went to the courthouse.

Ken Neal: Yes sir. I was at City Hall for eighteen months and Gene Curtis, my old friend, was named news editor, a new position, and that left a vacancy at the courthouse. In those days, we had kind of a hierarchy of rungs. The top rungs paid the most, that's the way we looked at it. City Hall, the courthouse, and from there, usually, you went to the state capital. We just had one capital reporter in those days.

I got my job when Phil Dessauer, who was a great reporter and editorial writer, came back from the capital to write editorials. That left a vacancy and Travis Walsh was sent to the capital to secede him. Travis was covering City Hall. So I was sent to City Hall.

Gene, meanwhile, had been covering the courthouse for eight or nine years, so he stayed there. And then when Gene became news editor I went to the courthouse. And if I remember, at the fall of '61, and I was there until the fall of '63.

JE: Some of your favorite topics when you were at the courthouse, what would they be? Taxes?

KN: Oh I've really kind of edged into that tax business. Actually, the courthouse was more fun than a barrel of monkeys because in those days the *World* reporter covered county government, including the county commissioners and so on, as well as the courts. I mean, we had more time so we did both.

Tribune had somebody covering county government and then somebody covering the courts because they were on a much tighter schedule.

One of my memories is a guy named Jay Bob Lucas, who was the brother of a famous war correspondent named Jim Lucas. Jay Bob is just a real grumpy, old guy, but once you got to know him he was really a lot of fun. Had a real fey sense of humor, just laid back and so on. It was always misery to me when I would miss Jay Bob on the run. Where is Jay Bob? Well, you knew you were in trouble because Jay Bob was off digging up something that was going to embarrass you, that *World* reporter, that is.

Sure enough, more than once I picked up the paper, the *Tribune*, and said, "My God, Jay Bob has beat me," to whatever it was.

I had a guy named Tom Bevere that covered the courts opposite me.

JE: Judges then at that time?

KN: Well, the judges, in those days we had four district court judges. Maybe a fifth, I can't remember, but the dean of the courthouse in those days, wildly respected by everything and still to this day well-loved, was a fellow named Lee Johnson. Lee had been nominated out of Pawnee County and ran, of course, at the whole district, but he was from Pawnee. But it was Lee Johnson, Raymond Graham, Eben L. Taylor, and I forgot the fourth one, to be honest about it.

And then we had four common pleas judges that handled misdemeanors and they had a certain jurisdiction up to so much. They did the preliminary hearings so it was a much simpler place to cover than it is now. I want to make that clear because I could almost cover the courts. They were all on one floor and so on.

When I first went over there my old friend from Sand Springs Bob Simms, Robert L. Simms, was the county attorney. He had become county attorney after Howard Edmondson became governor. Remember Howard was elected governor while he was county attorney in Tulsa. So Bob became the county attorney and then was elected to the county attorney's job himself. So he was county attorney.

Well, he had hired a young guy named David Hall. There were several others. Now Buddy, I think, Buddy Fallis, I think Buddy had been in the department and left for some reason because Buddy was not in the county attorney's office when I first went to the courthouse. He was subsequently rehired by David Hall, as I recall. He became David Hall's prosecutor; chief prosecutor in those days was the number two man in the county attorney's office. And so Buddy was chief prosecutor.

I once wrote a piece about him and described him as the "Peppery little prosecutor." And we laugh about that to this day. I see him. I'm one of the few people, I think, who really know what S. M. Fallis stands for. S. M. is Siviay Marlin Fallis Jr., but no wonder he's called Buddy.

Oh in those days it was not uncommon, I mean, we'd go in and talk to the judge anyway we wanted to, nearly every day, and they were very, very kind about it. As a matter of fact, the way the courts were arranged we could go in through the little anteroom, that's where the minute clerk hung out, and go right into the courtroom. There was a row of chairs in every courtroom where press was invited to sit. We went in and sat really up there pretty close to the judge.

And Lee, he would always say, "I really love the press." He said, "You know, I have never been misquoted by the press." He said, "Hell, I don't remember what I said most of the time either."

I had a lot of Lee Johnson stories.

Chapter 6
Tulsa Tribune—3:18

John Erling: You referenced the *Tribune*. There were friendly competitors?

Ken Neal: Well, some of them were friendly than others, let's put it like that. Really, when I became copy boy I was instructed, "Don't talk to those SOBs in the elevator. They'll steal your stories." You see, we used the same composing room so they would very jealousy guard *Tribune* copy and *World* copy and keep it separate because now nobody ever at the *World* ever did this but the *Tribune* people would read our copy and steal our stories. I mean—

JE: Is that true?

KN: Well, I'm joking, but I'm sure the *Tribune* people had the same thing to say about the *World*.

JE: Okay, right.

KN: No we weren't all that friendly. I subsequently found out that when you're out on a run with some of these guys we got friendly. Nolan Bullock was their ace reporter, if you want to use that term. He'd been an old crime reporter for years. He was probably around sixty when I was reporting at the courthouse. Well, every now and then, they would assign Nolan to cover a specific case or something at the courthouse. I would be covering it for the *World*. And Nolan would be working all morning, because they were on a morning schedule.

I found out real quick, I kind of got to know him, and I would come in like at two o'clock, *World* reporter. And Nolan would catch you up on what happened that morning. I mean, he was very, very gentlemanly. I always got along real well with Nolan Bullock. And I wasn't the only one. I mean, there was a lot of people. Now, Nolan, he had a reputation that did not match his personality, and I'm sure that was true of a lot of the *Tribune* reporters.

But it was competition. Man, we tried hard to get in the *World* first. And if the *Tribune* got it first, or vice versa, the other one would write what we called a "knock-downer."

JE: Oppose it?

KN: Well, there's some reason for that, I mean, if you had a triple axe murder the *Tribune* got you'd have to print it the next morning. But if it were some, let's call it enterprise reporting that the *Trib* did, well, we didn't think much of it, you know, and we'd rewrite it just a little bit and vice versa. The papers were about as competitive as you can be between a morning and afternoon paper. I mean, there's certain things that would, just because of the clock, break on *Tribune* times, some things would break on *World* time, where the other one couldn't do much about it.

JE: I don't know if considered it fun then but as you look back on it, wasn't it good the competition?

KN: Oh yeah. This is something that the public doesn't really understand is that, speaking for myself, and I think for some of my colleagues who really knew something about the newspaper business, we were very, very unhappy when the *Tribune* folded. I mean, I wish we had the *Tribune* publishing today, not because they were such a great bunch of guys. You know, we considered them to be SOBs, but it was nice to have the competition. It just makes a better newspaper on both sides. So we were unhappy to see the *Trib* go.

And that's a whole nother story. I mean, it was unavoidable. I was there on that, I know what the situation was. They had to do what they did and my management had to do what they did to take it over. But—

Chapter 7
Gov. David Hall—5:57

John Erling: You brought up the name of David Hall—

Ken Neal: Well, we were talking about the personalities. Bob Simms was the county attorney. He became a judge. David Hall was appointed county attorney by the county commission.

JE: Tulsa County Attorney?

KN: Yes sir, county attorney.

JE: Okay.

KN: And then he was county attorney until he was elected governor in 1970. We called him Crime Wave Dave.

JE: Why?

KN: Well, let's face it, I love old Dave, quite honestly. He's a good friend of mine still to this day, but he was a publicity hound. For example, I remember one time he announced that he was going down to the Old Majestic Theater to view a movie to see if it was indeed indecent.

And, of course, everybody in the courthouse showed up. I mean, he would take opportunities like that. He was a good man, frankly, I thought. Of course, he wound up serving time. I'm not even sure of the elements of that alleged crime, but there was no doubt about it that he would pursue those things that got him the most press.

JE: Very charismatic?

KN: Oh man, he was a Bill Clinton before Bill Clinton was even invented. David had a phenomenal memory. He was a big old good-looking guy, he looked like Stewart Granger.

Big mop of gray hair, in those days. Very energetic and, you know, one of those golly, gee guys that just was never down. He was really quite a guy.

JE: How many steps to go from Tulsa County to the Governor's Mansion?

KN: Well, he ran in '66. By that time I had left the paper for a while. Now this is David's personality. He called me, I went to one of his organizational meetings and he got me off to the side and said, "I want you to run my campaign."

JE: For governor?

KN: Yeah. And I was thinking about that. Well, wiser heads prevail. I didn't know come here from sic 'em about that. And so they got somebody else to run it. Then I was busy making my fortune, theoretically, so I wasn't all that unhappy.

Well, he didn't get out of the primaries, as I recall. Then he ran in 1970, and he narrowly beat Dewey Bartlett. He was less than one vote per precinct over the whole state. Then, of course, in '74, he was beaten in the primary. Coincidentally, I covered that '74 campaign. By that time I'd come back to the *World*—that's another story.

But that was one of the last times I'd seen him until recently when he was coming back to Oklahoma as one of the living governors, as part of the centennial festivities down at the Oklahoma Historical Event. David called me one day, and he said, "Well, I'm coming back to Oklahoma and you've always said that you wanted to interview me."

And I said, "Well, yeah, Dave, that's right."

He said, "I'm ready to do that."

And I said, "Well, that's good but you know now that I'm going to have to mention in the third paragraph that you served time."

"Oh yeah," he said, "I know that."

I did an interview with him, wrote a column about David, and he went, of course, to the Oklahoma City thing. And then the next day he and Jo came to Tulsa, we all had lunch together and the same old David. I mean, that day he called me it sounded like that we had never missed a beat. "Hi, Ken, this is David Hall." Just like he was still at the courthouse.

JE: Well, it was quite a story because he was convicted for bribery and extortion.

KN: Um-hmm (affirmative). He says, like everybody who is convicted, that he was wrongfully convicted.

JE: But that had to be huge, that story.

KN: Man, yeah.

JE: It was the first Oklahoma governor to ever be convicted of a criminal act. Served nineteen month.

KN: Yeah. There was a hell of a story there, excuse me, for, uh, his wife Jo, both of them were telling me about this—when he went to prison he served in Stafford, Arizona. And by the way, he served with Ehrlichman, John Ehrlichman, the Nixon guy.

JE: Yeah.

KN: Somebody was interviewing Ehrlichman some years later and they said, "Well, we understood that you served with our governor."

And he said, "Oh yes." Said, "That's right, he hadn't been there three months before he was running for president of the place."

But David said that his wife lived in Oklahoma City for half of that term, never missed a weekend driving to Stafford, Arizona, to see him. And then she moved to San Diego, and it was closer from San Diego to Stafford, but they tell a pretty poignant story about all that. I mean, you know, whether he was guilty or not guilty he wound up in prison, was disbarred, never was allowed to practice again. In spite of that, they raised three children and did pretty well.

JE: For those who—

KN: He may have deserved it, don't misunderstand me, I'm not taking up for him.

JE: Right. Because those who are listening to this are probably wondering what it was he did. And according to history, he was involved with the Secretary of State John Rogers, at the time. And they steered Oklahoma employee retirement funds to investment funds that were controlled by a Dallas—

KN: That was the intent, I don't think they ever got it done. I think John Rogers turned state evidence to keep from—if I recall. Really, I wasn't covering that then. I did write that column about old David that I didn't think pulled any punches. Now it was kind of a sympathetic character sketch of David and all the things that happened to him after he went to prison. See, he had never been back to Oklahoma officially since he went to prison. I'd hear from him every now and then but he never made a public appearance in Oklahoma. So naturally I wrote a column about him when he did come back.

The funny thing about it is they had this big event at the Historical Society and all of the former governors were there, something like seven of them. And they had a desk where you could go visit with each governor. I didn't go but my friends tell me that the other governors were like the Maytag repairmen, they said David got—

JE: All the attention.

KN: All the attention, yeah.

Chapter 8
Becoming Editorial Writer—2:47

John Erling: You were also a business editor?

Ken Neal: That was in my second incarnation with the *World*. I came back to the *World* Memorial Day, 1971. Because I remember my first day on the job was my day off.

JE: And you'd been off building houses, hadn't you?

KN: Uh, yeah, I built some houses along. And I had a chance to go into business with a fellow in Sapulpa. That's a long story I'd just as soon not get into. But needless to say, I didn't make my fortune. I called Sid and said, "Hey, I need a job."

And he said, "Well, first time we get an opening."

And I came back on the late city desk. I worked from six till two, continued to build houses, by the way. Then in about '72, Sid asked me to start what we call modern living. And kind of embarrassing to go back and look at it. I'm not very proud of that. I had done that because he asked me to, frankly. But I guess I complained enough that 1973, we had a charter race, they wanted to change the city charter. And they asked me to cover that and so I did that full time in '73, till that was over.

Then after that was over, Sid asked me if I'd like to do the political job in '74, covering local politics like the legislature, the governor's races up here, and the senate races. That's how come he had me cover the '74 race. After that race, Don Batchelder, who is our business editor, he had a heart condition and he needed to be relieved. So they made me business editor. And I was business editor for not much more than a year.

Then Phil Dessauer was writing editorials and he became the managing editor, which made an opening in the editorial department. And a fellow named Walter Biscuit had asked for me. And it's kind of interesting because I had worked for Walter when I was a copy boy.

One of the jobs that Sid got for me to help me with my income was doing the old thirty-year column. They used to have a "thirty years ago" column on the editorial page. Walter had been doing that, so Sid went to Walter and sold him on creating a job doing a thirty-year column.

Walter had been going down to the library every day and doing a few items for the "thirty years ago" column, and when they assigned it to me I went down there on Saturday and did a whole week in advance. And I had it on his desk on Monday.

At first, he said, "Well, you're supposed to do that every day."

And I said, "Well, Walter, the news is not going to change thirty years ago."

And he agreed to that. But apparently it kind of impressed him because that was in 1954, '55, and twenty years later, he asked for me. So I went back to writing editorials in September of 1976.

Chapter 9
County Assessor—4:47

John Erling: Cheryl Clay, former Tulsa County assessor. Was she one of your favorite topics?

Ken Neal: Well, not by choice. Wilson Glass had been the county assessor. The background on that is that when I was covering the courthouse in the '60s, we accessed property with fair market value and then we apply a fractional percentage to that that's used to determine the net accessed value and, therefore, the taxation.

The Oklahoma Constitution said that that could be as high as 33 percent, that fractional. And in those days, it was just all over the place. I mean, there were counties in which they were accessing it at 8 percent of fair market value. Tulsa was doing 31 percent of fair market value in 1961. Wilson was doing that.

Meanwhile, the state supreme court, trying to equalize, and my friend Bob Simms was a big gun in that, declared that that percentage ratio should be within the limits of nine to fifteen. So if you play with the mathematics, if you're using a 31 percent and you've got to reduce it to 15 percent, it means that you've got to do a lot of revaluing of the fair market value to produce the same amount of income.

So Wilson realized that he was going to have revalue the entire county. With the county commissioner's approval he hired private appraisers to reappraise the entire county. Well, you can imagine how that went over with the taxpayers. I mean, you get a bill and it turns out that you thought your house was worth sixty thousand. It turns out that these guys got it on the rolls at $120,000. Even though you're paying the same tax bill it created quite an uproar.

One of the people who was offended by this was Cheryl Clay. These are anecdotal stories but I'm told by some people at City Hall that she called and demanded that they get out there and fix the potholes in front of her street.

Well, the city didn't get one dime of ad valorem tax at that point, so she was kind of confused on who did what. But she was so unhappy about that, and Wilson was so unpopular, that she ran for County Assessor and was elected. Do and off and running then, I mean, it's purely an administrative job. I mean, this assessor now is doing the same thing.

A county assessor has no real control over setting the tax level, except that to do the administrative they're supposed to fairly appraise all the property. Then from there on the law and the mechanism determines the amount of assessed value, the millage and bond issues and so on levied against that determine what the final tax bill is. And the assessor doesn't have anything to do with any of that. All he's got a role in is setting the value.

And guess what? If you and I were going to reach an agreement here on me buying your house we wouldn't have any trouble setting the fair market value, would we?

JE: Right.

KN: But there's not an assessor in the state that understands fair market value. They always have it way too low, or worse, they take picks on their friends or so and so.

So we got off on a big campaign to get the ad valorem tax system reformed and Cheryl was one of the unfortunate targets. We had a continuing war with Cheryl Clay, and that's kind of the way we backed into that. We didn't pick on Cheryl Clay just because we didn't like Cheryl Clay. Although she didn't like us and she made that pretty plain.

JE: So she was the topic as you were editorizing?

KN: Oh yeah, it wasn't only me that was doing it but I got the blame for a lot of it.

JE: Wouldn't she be called your pet peeve?

KN: Oh, I never did misunderstand Cheryl. She's a politician and they get real excited about cutting taxes and all that sort of things.

Now she did some things that irritated me. For example, showing up in Sapulpa and taking pictures of my house and going to the Creek County assessor to make sure that I was paying my share of the taxes. She thought she was going to catch me.

Well, it turned out that I was paying a hell of a lot more taxes in Creek County than I would have been if I'd been under her tender care in Tulsa. So it kind of boomeranged.

JE: And so you obviously wrote about that?

KN: No I didn't, but the *Sapulpa Herald* did. I came in one day and a big picture of my house and me and everything else on page one of the *Sapulpa Herald*, as I recall.

JE: Well, did you use it as a footing for an editorial?

KN: No, we never did use it. I never said anything about it. To my memory, the news side probably wrote something about it.

JE: Yeah.

KN: But we didn't.

Chapter 10
Editorials—6:00

John Erling: Was there an editorial that you can recall that upset a great number of people and you thought the whole world was crashing in on you because of the words you wrote?

Ken Neal: Well, I've sure many times used the wrong words. And I don't remember one that just everybody was upset about, but various groups would be upset at various times. That

campaign, which by the way, you know, nearly every old geezer my age thinks that he's paying too much taxes. And people who are on fixed incomes, I mean, the house would be paid for but they'd be paying an annual tax on it.

Young people don't usually complain because their tax bill usually is part of their payment. But an old guy who's got everything paid for, every January 1st has to write a check for like four thousand dollars, well, he hacked about it. I've had more complaints about that probably than any other thing.

I have had incidents where I used the wrong word. I did offend Bob Dick one time. He fired a friend of mine named Harry Ekeus.

JE: What was Bob's position then?

KN: Police Chief. I said offended him, Harry Ekeus wrote a little ha-ha, humorous thing. He was a policeman and a sergeant at the time. And he wrote a little piece called *The Cemetery Times*. Which was the sort of things happening around the police department and so on. And there was a black officer who was a friend of Harry's, and Drew Diamond was the other guy.

Well, they both got promotions, and Harry wrote in *The Cemetery Times* that they got their major wings, or whatever it was, and of course, Drew is Jewish, so he said, "Well, Drew was going to put a Star of David on his. And the black guy was going to mud flaps on his." It was a racist kind of thing, but it was in—I mean, the guys involved were cackling, the whole department is cackling over it.

Well, Bob just hauled off and really punished old Harry. I mean, he busted him back to private and Harry was about to retire and it affected his retirement, all kinds of things. And I thought it was a bit Draconian and I wrote it and said so. I still remember it was Chief Dick's overreaction, or something.

Of course, that brought Dick and all the black preachers and everybody else in to chew on me a while.

JE: Face-to-face?

KN: Oh yeah, sure, they'd come in many times. And we'd always accommodate them. Like Alex said, "We just manfully furnish the ass for a lot of that, you know."

JE: So did the paper say you went over the line?

KN: No. And this is something that I've always admired about Bob Lorton, who was my boss for many, many years, is that Bob, he never wanted to read an editorial before it went in the paper. Now there were times when I knew that he needed to read it because I was setting policy for the whole newspaper and I'm not stupid, you know. I would send it on to him to make sure that I wasn't putting him on grounds where he didn't want to be. Because the truth matter is that even though we were writing the editorials, Bob was taking the flack for a lot of that stuff, because he owned the newspaper.

And so many people say, “Well, he owns the newspaper, why doesn’t he stop those guys from advocating tax increases or something?”

Well, you know, he always has taken the attitude, so does his son now. That, “Look, we can’t tell editorial writers what to write. I mean, if we’re going to do that we might as well just come up with our own editorials and go from there.” He’d been very, I think, broadminded about that.

Now that doesn’t mean that we didn’t get him in trouble a lot of time. Matter of fact, we had a luncheon. He through a luncheon for me when I announced that I was going to retire and I think about the start of 2007, when I turned it over to David. We had a luncheon and he got up and he said, “Well, Ken, you sure gotten us in a lot of holes down through the years.”

To which I said, “Yeah, and you’ve gotten us into a few too.” I mean, he’s that kind of a guy. You can get him and talk to him. He’s a good man. I don’t mean to blow smoke on my old boss, I mean, I’m out of his reach now, so I can say what I think.

But people do not realize, most people do not realize, people who know him know that. But I think they’ve always had a broadminded approach to that. And frankly, it’s good business. If you’ve got a newspaper that you’re just a one-track deal where you don’t have any controversy, frankly, controversy is what spurs the letters. That’s one thing that we’ve done down through the years is try to encourage and increase the number of letters, and we have dramatically over the years.

And the editorials, I never did expect people to read an editorial and say, “Oh yeah, I agree with that. I’ll go out and act accordingly.” But they can write in and say, “Well, I don’t believe that.” You know, just argue about it.

And the best read thing on the editorial page was always the letters. At least when I was handling it. Because people liked to read the letters column and hear what each other is saying. And write in and say, “Well, old Charlie didn’t know what he’d talking about, you know.” And so on and so on and so on.

Chapter 11
The Lorton’s—5:55

John Erling: As students listen to this, and some perhaps want to become an editorial writer, is there a tract to follow? Or is there a style? Or are you just born wanting to write in longer form than a reporter?

Ken Neal: No, I don’t think so. One time a young reporter came to me, I was in the

department, I'm not sure I was head of the department then. She'd had about three or four years experience and she said, "I'd like to start writing editorials. How do I do that?"

I said, "Well, I was here twenty-five years before they let me loose." I can only speak for the *Tulsa World*. And I've had to defend that.

A guy came down here one time from New York or some place, and he was just incensed that we didn't have a black on our editorial staff. You know, it was a big deal when we promoted a couple of women in there. Frankly, some of my old bosses probably wouldn't have done that. I brought both of the women back there. And we would have a black.

But what we've always done is promoted from within, and promoted people with experience. In my judgment, you don't take a twenty-five-year-old person who's got two or three years experience and make an editorial writer out of him. There could be an argument made for that.

But what about the guy that's been on the staff twenty years and covered all those runs. And it comes time to promote and you promote somebody that's under him in the newsroom. It's just not good for employee morale. So we've always considered the editorial writing jobs as the best jobs and the in jobs on that newspaper.

Now other newspapers may do it differently. And there can be arguments made for doing it differently, I know that. But that has been what we've been working on.

It brings up kind of a touchy thing. We've had some really outstanding black folks, male and female, working for the *World*. We've had a hard time holding on to them. One fellow that showed so much promise as editor, really a brilliant guy, wound up as the editor of *Sports Illustrated*, I think.

One of the guys that came down here, we talked about it one day, he came back to see him and his name, Ray Marcano. Well, Ray was black and he used to laugh and say that he's a two-fer. He's black with a Hispanic surname. He was talking about race relations and he said, "Black people my age, me, have a lot of old hurts and so on from the years of segregation. And I can see that. But the young people did not labor under that." And so he would say to young people, "Look, if you're black and you've got ability, the sky's the limit."

JE: Yeah.

KN: Ray proved that, he didn't stay with us a year before he went on to bigger and better things. He was a good hand and a smart guy. And that's been the experience there.

So do we have any black people on the staff that have got the experience that we've said needed to be done? Not yet. For a long time we didn't have any women, and that sort of thing. But then when it came to make some changes we had Jan Pearson, who had been there since she was eighteen. And although she looks considerably younger than that, she's been on that paper thirty-five years, I guess. So we brought her into the editorial department.

And then when we had another opening there we had Julie DelCour, who had covered all of the bombing, I mean, just a tip-top reporter. So we brought her into the editorial department.

And there were other women that are qualified. And that's been something that has changed so much since I first came in is that many of our top people are women. I think if we just did a head count we probably got more women in the newsroom than men now. When I first went in I could count the female reporters, there were two: Joanne Gordon and Freda Gold.

JE: And why is that? That the women have surfaced and been backed out?

KN: You know, women have been let into the professional world everyplace. You know, there are a hell of a lot more female lawyers than there were, you know—when I went to the courthouse there was one notorious female lawyer that I remember.

Now there was one female judge, and she was kind of an anomaly, the first. So that's happened in a lot of professions.

My own daughter is a lawyer. And when she came out of law school it was right at the time when every law firm needed to have a female on the staff, because they were becoming aware that women were coming into their own on that.

So this paper business isn't the only business that shares that situation. But it is a profession in which women can excel, and they do. They are very, very good reporters.

I tell my wife that's because they're just naturally more nosy than men. I don't get away with that, by the way.

JE: It's still a good mix between male and female in the journalism business?

KN: Yeah it's a good mix. It's just we've opened up the opportunity. For example, this is another thing that makes me love the Lortons. I mean, there was a time when I looked over the salaries in the department and the two women were not making what they should, compared to the men in the department.

Now the men had more seniority in the department, more seniority on the paper, but there was too big a discrepancy between the salaries. So I go to young Bobby Lorton and say, "You know, Bob, we need to adjust these things so that the women are getting as much as the men on a comparative basis."

He didn't bat an eye and a couple of those women got five or six hundred dollars a month increases. So I think that shows a little bit of enlightenment. I mean, a lot, as a matter of fact. Those things are fond memories of mine of my management guys. I mean, they treated me very, very well down through the years, both personally and in what I wanted to do in the department.

Chapter 12
Names and Stories—24:21

John Erling: You have brought along a list of names here. How many? Eighty?

Ken Neal: Yeah I got around eighty-eight names.

JE: Can you scan down there and just bring some of them up and maybe somebody listening to this would be interested to know that you have mentioned them?

KN: Well, of course, I mentioned Sid, and Lee Earhard, Ray Billings, LaRoy Randall who was a great photographer for the *World* during the war years and who died untimely. Jack Kinsey who was a deskman and close friend of mine.

Matter of fact, the picture that I sent you of me at a typewriter in 1954, Jack just showed up one day and took that picture. Why? I don't know. I think he was experimenting with a camera.

JE: I liked your red argyle socks, by the way.

KN: Yeah. John Gold was probably the quintessential city editor. I said at his funeral that we all aspired to be as good as John but none of us ever made it. John was city editor twenty years, from '60 through '80. He was a very, very outstanding guy.

Troy Gordon was one of my old friends. Troy died fairly long. He and Julie Blakely who was a society editor for many years, as I put it, raised me around the *World*. I mean, they made me feel welcome. And they kidded and joked and so on and made me feel a part of the *World*. And taught me a great deal about just getting around.

JE: And Troy had his own column, didn't he?

KN: Oh yeah. He wrote "Round the Clock." He didn't originate that but he made it what it was. And for a period there in the '60s it was very, very good. His wife, Joanne Gordon, was a good feature writer and a good news reporter.

Now here's a name that not many people, I suspect, remembers. But the society editor when I started was named Maureen Halliburton. And I used to get in trouble with her because I was supposed to go back on Thursday night, gather up her copy, take it, and deliver it to the composing room. I would forget it and she took offense at that. She thought I was picking on her because she was society editor and a woman and so on and she pretty well straightened me out a couple of times.

There's a woman that's still alive. Elmera Smith was a young woman in society in those days. There was a woman named Sabra Smith whose claim to fame—one time Sid had a really tough operation. They took out a big part of his stomach. This was in the early '60s. Sid was a very soft-voiced guy, you could hardly hear him. And Sabra won undying fame around the newsroom. When she heard about Sid's operation, she said, "Well, I hope they turn up his volume while they're in there."

Of course, I mentioned Charlie Clark that I seceded. Charlie Smith seceded me and I seceded him.

There was a good friend of mine who died here a couple of years ago named Chuck Wheat who, when I went on the paper, was the part-time deskman, a brilliant guy. He was a great reporter, and he left there and became a speechwriter for some of the very big oil people and spent a whole career there.

A fellow named Young Mitchell who was on the desk, later in the oil department. I later worked with him as a deskman when I came back in '71. His wife was Margaret Smith who was the daughter of Marshall Smith, who was the editorial page editor before Walter. Way back there.

John Turner was a sports writer that not many people remember. He was in the department when I came in.

We had two John Fergusons. There was Little Fergy, we called him. I can't remember what their middle initials were. But this other Ferguson was a big, obscene body kind of a guy. He's really a loveable character but he was something.

There was a guy named Jack Kelly who was in the sports department. And later on was a reporter and a friend of mine.

Tom Lowball that you may remember. He covered golf for a hundred years, right? Or it seemed like.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

KN: The sports editor was named B. A. Bridgewater. He had been the managing editor of the old *Evening World*. *World* published an evening paper for a while in the '30s. Then he came back on as the sports editor and he stayed there. I later worked with his son Dolph Bridgewater. It was Bernard Adolphus Bridgewater, their names. Old Dolph, we called him, was a big old guy, and he was an assistant county attorney with David Hall.

But Bridge, everybody called him Bridge, was a big friend of Sam Avey. In those days he had the Coliseum and they did the Babies' Milk Fund. We promoted that, wrestling, and all that kind of stuff. I made the mistake one time of calling him Bilgewater. These detractors called him Bilgewater. He straightened me out pretty quick.

Bill Connors was in college at the time I came on and he came on, I think full time at about fifty-five, and later became, of course, the premiere sports editor and columnist for the *World*. A guy with tremendous ability.

Sid Steen told me in later years that he wanted Bill to become his managing editor. And he offered Bill the job. And Bill said, "No thanks." Smart guy.

Chuck Bales was an old boy from Sand Springs that I knew and worked with for years.

A fellow named Joe Cannon. I'm just thinking of the names in the newsroom. He covered aviation. And I don't know what happened to Joe.

There's a guy named John Clayton. John was a skull at the ace of the staff, or one of the top reporters when I came on. And I learned something from John, and he doesn't even know that I learned it. I picked up a piece of his copy one night. The Sheriff's Department had bought a new airplane. I was always impressed because I picked up the story that he wrote about that. He had written a lead, and it was just a simple statement, it said, "The Sheriff Has a New Airplane." Period, paragraph, that was it. That was about as short a lead as you could get.

But we prided ourselves on writing very short leads to get the reader, we thought, into it. We used to kid old Don Batchelder who I mentioned in here. Someone who is a very close friend of mine. We were in college together and later worked together. Old Batch was doing obits and they kept telling him to write shorter leads, write shorter leads, write shorter leads. So he turned one in that said, "Dead." Period, paragraph. "That's What He Was." He was quite a clown.

And of course, I mentioned Curtis. And I already mentioned Finley. One of the City Hall reporters before Travis was a fellow named Cecil Brown. I didn't know Cecil very well. I just met him and then I read stuff later. Travis I mentioned, I knew him.

Chuck Satterly was a desk man, was probably one of the most brilliant guys you'd run into. But he was so irascible that nobody could get along with him. He was one of the fellows that'd just back you into a corner when he was talking to you.

And then there was Harold Davis. He was the weekend wire editor when I was copy boy. He would send me across to a little café every night to get a jar of bean juice. I remember old Harold, and he had worked for the *New York Herald American*. I think he had a drinking problem so he was coming down to the minor leagues, so to speak. But he was a very capable guy and everybody thought a lot of Harold.

I remember he was left-handed, and the composing room would almost nightly send me back to Harold to find out what this was. Because you could hardly read his handwriting.

Some of these were people that we called gypsies in those days. They were floaters. They'd come in temporarily, work four or five, be gone to another newspaper and so on. Sid would hire them because you needed the help and they were cheap, I guess.

A fellow named Dudley Early was one of those guys. My introduction to him, I went back to the men's room one night and poor Dudley was back there just sweating and straining and so on. He had broken the zipper on his pants and he couldn't get his pants zipped up. So he sent me out and I rounded up some safety pins for him.

And then there was Nita Hendricks Connors. Her name was Nita Hendricks at the time I went in. She was a receptionist and was a receptionist forever. She ultimately married Bill Connors.

Angie Henthorn was the editor of the paper at the time.

Paul Hedrick was the old original oil editor that knew the original Lorton, Eugene Lorton. I worked for him.

Clarence Mantooth was really the oil editor, the guy I worked for.

A fellow named John Sparks that worked in the oil department.

Yvonne Litchfield.

I mentioned Don Batchelder. A good friend of mine, now dead.

Carol Griffey who was Batchelder's nemesis and his classmate at TU. Batch got in trouble with her 'cause they were team reporting at TU one time and Batch was calling Carol and she was writing the story. They were practicing being rewrite and legman at the time. So they had a name misspelled. Of course, Griffey was mad at Batch because he gave her the wrong spelling and they both got an F on their paper.

Tom Wood who gave the F was a TU professor who worked at the *Tulsa World* many times. A very excellent guy.

I mentioned Ed Johnson who was head of the department.

Riley Wilson, one of a kind, was a reporter when I went there and subsequently was sent back as the oil editor in about early '57, I guess.

Fenton Harris, now there's a name that not many people remember. I remember Fenton very well because I don't know if it was on the first night that I was on the job but it was very early on. Fenton corners the new copy boy, that's me, and said, "Say, could I borrow a dollars?"

I said, "Well, I'm sorry, I don't have a dollar." And I reached in my pocket and pulled out the change I had.

And he looked at it and he grabbed it and said, "That'll do."

Jack Fencher was a name.

Marvin Southwick worked for the *Tribune*, I think, but he was back in our newsroom.

Woody Gaddis was a photographer and a good friend of mine.

So was John Witworth.

I mentioned Julie and I could talk about Julie for hours. Matter of fact, Julie was fatally ill. She was living in California. I had exchanged letters with her. She wrote and said that when the time comes she wanted me to write her obituary. So when Julie died I just wrote a feature about Julie. First time I'd ever been assigned an obituary by the person who was going to die, but I did it for Julie.

JE: Hmm, hmm.

KN: Nick Folds was the desk man.

Judy Auderstrom, later was Judy Randall.

Dinah Sue Walker, you may have heard about her. Brenda Heck was one of her buddies back there.

There was a woman named Jackie Stringer. I mean, I remember her because there was an incident where I dragged Julie and Jackie out of the Horseshoe Lounge in a loud voice, saying, "Mama, I've told you a hundred times not to blow your check in here."

Phil Dessauer I mentioned.

Malvina Stevenson was the *World's* correspondent in Washington when I was state editor.

Tim Jackson was a desk man when I showed up. And later he went to Chicago as a PR guy. Later came back to the *World*. Great reporter.

Bill Sansing was the *AP* man.

Toby LaForge of Cat Creek Carol fame. Old Toby worked for the *Tribune* for years and years and years and he would write a little bit of doggerel right in front of a lot of his features, which he called the "Cat Creek Carols." He kind of fallen on hard times and I think the *Trib* let him go for various reasons. I won't say what.

But Sid, who had worked with him and knew him very well, hired him. Well, Toby was a wonderful old guy and he was just a grizzled veteran, old newspaper man, and he wore glasses about that thick, and he couldn't see through them even then. He was just across the aisle from me and I would hear him and he would start out every conversation, "Hon, this is Toby." I mean, he'd call the White House and say, "Hon, this is Toby."

Well, Sid was within earshot and he hears that so every now and then he'd say, "Toby, you need to identify yourself better than 'Hon, this is Toby.' "

And so for a while, you'd hear old Toby over there and he'd say, "This is Wallace Laforge, a reporter at the *Tulsa Daily World*." Then about three days later it was back to, "Hon, this is Toby."

I heard him one night dealing with an accident situation in which someone had been killed but the family didn't know about it. Toby called the family and found out that they had not heard the news yet. And I remember just thinking, Boy, he knew how to handle that," because he was very understanding and tactful.

And then there was Herb Carter who was farm editor. I saw him here just the other day. He had a right-hand guy named Dobie Cheryl.

We had Brother Robert who was the son of one of the early mortuaries here in town. Brother Robert would come and he always had on an overcoat and he always had a wilted rose in it. And he'd just shuffle along and he'd go through all the wastebaskets. I mean, he was just kind of one of those guys. I mean, everybody knew him. I never did figure out what he was looking for. Because in those days we had sixty-gallon drums mounted on wheels and the cleaning ladies would come along and pick up all that paper that we developed. It'd just be a barrel of paper, literally, nothing in there. But Brother Robert would nose around through that and never did find out much about him.

Had an old gal named Nurse Irene that really was a nurse. And she, she was just full of conspiracies. She'd call you and say, "Go to page fourteen on the classified ads."

"Yes."

And said, "Now you see where it says 'Dog for sale'?"

"Yeah."

"Now mark that and turn it over on the other side. Now on the other side of it you'll find a story that says so and such, and see?" Somehow she concocted a conspiracy about all that.

JE: Was she a reader?

KN: She was just a character that would show up in the newsroom.

JE: Okay.

KN: Come wandering in and—

JE: Yeah.

KN: She was widely tolerated. You know, in those days we didn't even have any guards downstairs. You'd just walk in and—when a guy would come in with a briefcase the reporters would all run. Because he'd walk up to the city desk and the city editor, in order to get rid of him, would assign him back to a reporter. Some of the real characters would come in, you know.

And one night there was a very good looking Indian fellow, I mean, he was a tribal kind of guy. Real well dressed, had a big briefcase, and he walked up and talked to Ray Billings a little while. Ray told him, said, "Well, go back here and talk to Toby."

Toby was on the phone. This guy sat down there and got his briefcase out and got all of his stuff out. But old Toby, after he hung up the phone, he was looking at that guy and he said, "Now, son, what kind of a—thing are you trying to sell?" That was his only words.

Howard Hopkins was a freelance photographer around Tulsa who ran Hopkins Photography. We knew Hoppy real well.

Bill Ellis was a reporter that was in there for a while. Bill had the dirtiest copy you've ever seen. But it was good. I mean, it looked like it had been written on a pencil and edited on a typewriter. He was a good, good feature writer but so many of those guys were hunt and peckers, you know, they just—

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

KN: There's a guy named Ken Frakes that later worked at University of Tulsa. I affectionately called him Grape Nuts Frakes.

But Dale Spear who is a very young guy and I christened him Baby Huey. 'Cause he looked a lot like that cartoon character, you know. Or we thought he did. He was very offended by that.

Allen Gardler was a police reporter.

Roscoe Turner who is mad at me because when I showed up there I remember him running the elevator. We used to have an elevator operator and when she went to lunch Roscoe would run the elevator. I think he worked on the janitorial staff. He was a young man, you know, he was about my age.

JE: He was talking about Roscoe turner who became a city councilor.

KN: Oh yeah, uh-huh (affirmative). And LouAnn Ruarke who was a senior when I was a freshman and I knew her for a long, long time.

Maurice DiVinna, a real character who was a fine arts editor. And there are all kinds of stories about Maurice that I won't even go into. But Maurice was an honorary French Council, I mean, the French government had conferred that on him. And Maurice took it seriously. This is one story.

One night he was caught drunk driving and they were trying to book him and he claimed diplomatic immunity. Tried to.

And the police said, "Well, okay, we'll let you do that, but we're going to deport you, you know."

Sid was always bailing Maurice out.

Of course, Maude Lawton Myers was our publisher in those days. I mean, she'd seceded the old man when her husband died.

Byron Boone was the lawyer for the paper and later became the publisher.

You mentioned Alex, I've already said Alex King worked there for the *UP* in the early '60s. Subsequently I think I mentioned him.

JE: Yes you have, and the fact that you two have a very close relationship to this day.

KN: Oh yeah, we're still very close. And till this day I'd still as soon to have lunch with Alex as anybody I know. And we must have gone to lunch, I don't know, on an average of three times a week. Because he always has such a good take on things, very interesting. He's a Civil War expert. Just a magnificent history guy. I mean, he will read something and then tell me all about the book he's read.

And I said, "Well, I don't need to read it, you've already told me about." But he's really a good conversationalist and so much fun.

One of the real characters was Lula Eagle Quenlen. But, Lula, bless her heart, was about five feet tall. Looked like she wore the same dress all the time. She had a little old hat that she wore that had a feather on the top of it. She was always working in the garden, and when she came in she never bothered to change her clothes or anything. And she was quite a character.

Every year she would tell people when to plant seeds and so on. And we had a picture that could be run, it was exactly three columns long and one column wide. So you could run it as a three-column or a one-column. And it had three plates. And theoretically

they had seeds in there that she could identify. As a practical matter, you could run it upside down, crossways, any way you wanted to. And every year she'd want us to run that with her column when it came time. So we'd dutifully do that.

When I was state editor it became my duty, among other things, to edit Lulu's garden column. Well, she was not very happy with me. She called me "Old Neal the Axeman."

What she would do is she had a number of publishers. And she would put a few favorable words about X book or whatever, right at the end. So they'd send her books and so on. It was so long I got to where I was just whacking it off. So I woke up one day and she had inserted that real high in her column on the theory that I'd cut from the bottom. But—

My favorite story about her is I was state editor and it was a real hot summer day and she wanted to deliver a column. She called me and said, "Now would you come down on the street there and get my column so I don't have to park?"

And I said, "Oh yeah, I'll be glad to." Well, I forgot her. And pretty soon she got off the elevator and, boy, it was one of those Donald Duck scenes where she was so mad. She's a little old lady about this high. And she announced in a loud voice, "Okay, which one of you—forgot me?" She was something.

There was a young reporter named Fred Davis.

There was an old guy that was named Jack Eldridge who was a PR man for a circus that came to town every year. And old Jack would come in. Of course, we all got free circus tickets and all that kind of stuff. He had free reign.

There was a guy named Dave Wood who was a good reporter, kind of if you keep him sober. I remember he covered the 1957 liquor conspiracies trials. Did a good job on that.

We had a fellow named John Lawrence who they assigned to be the medical reporter, not knowing that John was a Christian Scientist. And old John was famous for two remarks that he'd make around there. Somebody would call him and want him to do something. And he said, "Look, partner, I can't help you." Said, "I just load the trucks." Or he would say, "Well, we got a new managing editor. I guess we're going to have to go out and paint the rocks." That kind of stuff, he was something.

Well, that's enough of them. I know those names won't ring bells with a lot of people, and some of them won't.

JE: But the fact that you recalled all those names—

KN: Well, I've probably forgotten some of them, but their incidents connected with them had helped me to remember some of it.

Now do you understand that my memory's better about those days than it is about last week?

JE: I'm going to ask you, what were you listing there?

KN: I tried to remember some of the printers. There was a guy named Jerry Slankerd that was a shop foreman when I showed up.

There was another guy named Oscar something. I forgot his last name.

One of my good friends was Glen Chronister from Sand Springs. We called old Glen, "Chronister the Monister." Oh he came puffing in one day to tell me that Bud Caffey who was the county commissioner for District Two out in Western Tulsa County, was grading a place in Osage County. A place called "Em's Club." Which was just kind of a little dug-out place and kind of a nightspot. I mean, you know, just a sleazy place. And old Bud was spreading gravel on the parking lot, scattered it and all that kind of stuff. So we sent a photographer out there and got a picture of the District Two equipment at Em's Club. We ran a little story on it.

Bud came in to explain to us, I think maybe I called him that night and talked to him, but he said that that was the school bus turnaround. That that was the only place that they could figure out to have a school bus turnaround because there was a little school down south end of Tulsa County. So he was grading that school bus turnaround. But Bud was a politician, so sure enough, the next night here came Bud who was about six feet three, and a guy that was even bigger than Bud. They came stomping in the newsroom to talk to yours truly, and this was the principal of that little school. And he claimed that, "Yeah, that's what it was," and so on and so on.

But anyway, it's one of those lessons that if Bud had ignored that it would have gone away. But they came in. Well, then, we had to write a story.

JE: Yeah.

KN: So it went on and on. I later came to really appreciate old Bud. He did some things, for example, he got Wiley Hissom to donate the land for Hissom. He got Claude Chandler to donate the land for Chandler Park. Bud did all right himself.

One time he was graveling church parking lots, which was technically illegal. But, of course, the church folks were very appreciate of that. He could do no wrong. So the *Tribune*, the *Tribune* was uncovering those church parking lots one by one. Every time they'd get one they'd write a big story about it. Old Bud called an editorial writer at the time named Bill Henthorn. This was the *World* guy. I could hear him saying this, he said, "Bill, if I'd give you a list of all the parking lots I've graveled would you print her?"

Old Bill said, "Oh yeah."

So Bud brought the list over and we printed the list and it killed the *Tribune's* expose day in the water. But Bud's idea of public property was any piece of land owned by more than two people. That was pretty common in those days actually.

Listen, I'm just prattling on here. I don't know what you want—

JE: This is, no, this is great."

Chapter 13
65 in 2,000—4:19

John Erling: I've talked to you about writing a book. Are you going to write a book?

Ken Neal: Well, I'm working on some things, not along these lines. I don't see this as a book, I mean, this is just remembrances.

JE: Right.

KN: I'm just going to put it down for the paper and maybe my family. Now I'm working on some things. I may do just a little collection of short stories. You know, I've written hardly anything longer than fifteen hundred words. Most of the time. So that's kind of my inclination. You know, it's like Mark Twain said, "I had to write a long one because I didn't have time to write a short one."

And that's kind of the thing my friend Alex would come puff in a lot of times. Said, "Well, I had to write a long editorial," said, "I didn't have time to write a short one."

It's much harder to take something long and boil it down and make it say something in fewer words. But I spent all my years trying to do that. I didn't always succeed. So it's kind of hard now to expand on things. Although I'm working on that. I'm going to, I think, flush out some incidents by making up some dialogue.

JE: Could you take some of your editorials and use them in a book and then write the lead up to them and reaction thereof and—

KN: I might do that, but, boy, that requires a lot of work. I mean, I've got all of the columns I've written since 1981. My secretary has put them all on DVD for me. I can go back and see all those, but some of them are pretty embarrassing.

There are some things, like the ad valorem thing and so on, that probably would be worthwhile. I've been urged to do that, matter of fact, the *University of Oklahoma Press* contacted me about that. But I just haven't been able to get real enthused about it. Maybe I should, I don't know. So far I haven't been retired long enough to get to want to do something. It seems like I'm on vacation, you know.

JE: You retired at what age?

KN: Seventy, well, this last January was when I fully retired.

JE: Okay. You were a copy boy at seventeen?

KN: Yes sir.

JE: Years old. Never in your wildest dream as a copy boy that first day?

KN: No, matter of fact, I wrote a column about this in the year 2000. The night that I was hired in, Lee Earhard, either he asked me or it was on the little questionnaire that they had me fill out. I have no idea why. They wanted to know the year in which I'd be sixty-

five. I was from Sands Springs High School so I could cipher. So I figured it out real quick: I'd be sixty-five in the year 2000.

Old Lee turned to Sid at an adjoined desk and he said, "Sid, this boy won't be sixty-five until the year 2000." And they had a big laugh about that. I mean, the two old guys, you know.

And I remembered that. So when 2000 rolled around I recalled that and said, "My God, where did the time go?" People just forget that fifty years go by real quick. We're lucky if we plan for two years ahead. That's probably the single most politically, intractable problem is that how do you get people to—tax themselves, for example, today for something that won't pay off for twenty years?

Take schools, for example. You pay an increased tax to finance early childhood. Society won't benefit from that for fifteen, twenty years, probably.

JE: Yeah.

KN: And President Obama, you know, is looking at that right now. How do you get people to cough up money right now? Like energy, for example? You put money in solar energy and windmill energy and all that sort of thing. A lot of investment and it will be a long time, years, before it really pays off.

Excuse me, I start preaching. You might get an editorial there before too long.

JE: Well, this has been fun.

KN: My friend Ed once said, "You have to be about two-thirds Baptist preacher to be an editorial writer." Chuck Slatterly used to say, "The secret to being an editorial writer is to come to work in a white heat and then get angry."

JE: Thank you. You've shared—

KN: Well, my privilege. I hope I've brought up a few names that we don't want to forget them. 'Cause every one of them were people who worked hard and were characters in their own right.

JE: Well, this will be on a website that people can click on and hear it for years and years to come. Thank you, Ken.

KN: Thank you, John.

JE: Yeah.

Chapter 14
Conclusion—0:33

Announcer: (music) This oral history presentation is made possible through the support of our generous funders. We encourage you to join them by making your donation, which will allow us to record future stories. Students, teachers and librarians are using this website

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