Voices of OKLAHOMA

Jay O'Meilia

"People ask what I consider to be my masterpiece, and I tell them I have five: my children."

Chapter 01 – 1:46
Introduction

Announcer: Philip Jay O'Meilia was born in 1927 in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Between military stints during World War II and Korea (serving as a Navy artist), he attended the Art Students League in New York and the Chicago Academy of Fine Art.

O'Meilia's work has been displayed in galleries and museums across America, including the Smithsonian Institution, the National Academy of Design in New York, and the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City.

His sculptures, paintings, serigraphs, and prints are in the permanent collections of more than five hundred private and corporate organizations worldwide.

In 1965, Jay won first place in a national competition sponsored by Abercrombie & Fitch for his painting Night Baseball, which began his rise to prominence as one of the country's finest sports artists.

O'Meilia is highly regarded for his artistic depiction of professional and collegiate football, particularly the University of Oklahoma.

In 1970, he created his first sculpture, *On Deck*, which began yet another phase of O'Meilia's career.

After starting small, he graduated to greater-than-life-size monuments, beginning with his first commissioned piece, *Roughnecks*, which stands in Tulsa's Mid-Continent Building. *The Oil Patch Warrior,* which resides in England's Sherwood Forest, was O'Meilia's first international monument.

Jay O'Meilia has won twenty-six regional and national awards for both oil and watercolor. He has been a member of the American Watercolor Society since 1965, and is a member of the Watercolor USA Honor Society. He is also a colleague of the National Sculpture Society in New York.

In 1999, Jay O'Meilia was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame.

And now listen to Jay O'Meilia tell you about his interesting life and career on *VoicesofOkahoma.com*.

Chapter 02 – 9:25
Uncle Woody

John Erling: My name is John Erling. And today's date is November 20, 2013. Jay, would you state your full name, your date of birth, and your full age?

Jay O'Meilia: Well, my legal name is Philip Jay O'Meilia. My date of birth is July 17, 1927.

JE: That makes you how old?

JO: Eighty-six.

JE: About your name, Philip Jay O'Meilia. Why aren't you known as Phil or Philip? We all know you as Jay, what's the story there?

JO: I hated Philip because when I was in grade school Little Lord Fauntleroy was in, you know, and they'd say, "Here comes Little Philip." And I'd have to knock some kid's head off out on the playground.

So finally when I was in the fifth grade, I went to a parochial school, Marquette, and I asked the sweet nun, I said, "Sister Marianna, please don't call me Philip. I get in these problems."

She said, "I know, with the reports coming back on the playground that you seem to be getting in trouble out there."

I said, "Well, they make fun of me and I don't take that too well." And I said, "I want to be known as Jay, because my mother, when she was pregnant with me, her fourth child, she wanted a girl so bad that she, by golly, being a full-blooded German and matriarch type was going to will herself to have a girl for her fourth child.

Unfortunately, Dr. McDonald, who was the first OB in Tulsa at that time, came in. My mother's name was Georgeanna, but everybody called her George, he said, "George, Phyllis is now Philip."

And my dad said, "That's the first time I heard your mother use a four-letter word.

So she said, "By God, he's going to be Philip then."

So I just never liked it. It looks good on other people.

JE: So then when you wanted to be known as Jay at school, did your parents and everybody pick up on that?

JO: Yeah.

JE: They honored that?

JO: They honored that.

JE: Right.

JO: You know, and I've honored it on credit cards or on business stuff, I tell them, "I know I have to use my legal name of Philip, but my name is Jay, that's what I go by. Okay?"

JE: We're recording this interview here in our recording facilities here at VoicesofOklahoma.com. Where were you born?

JO: Tulsa, Oklahoma, St. Johns Hospital.

JE: Your mother's full name?

JO: Georgeanna Lofferswyler. That's Prussian, full-blooded Prussian. Her father actually and mother, came from Munster, Germany, to Minster, Ohio, this little farming community north of Dayton. Most of them were like the Westerheidis and the Brennans and the Lofferswylers. There was a large German farming community, so they adopted the name Minster, you know, Americanized it from Munster. So that was where she came from.

JE: That's obviously then where she grew up. What was she like? Describe her, and was she artistic?

JO: Well, she was very artistic. She had the talent of her seventeen other brothers and sisters. She was the second youngest of eighteen. In fact, I'm going to use a picture in my book. The only thing that we have of her work is a charcoal drawing, which is fabulous. But in those days, young ladies did not go to art school and draw naked people. They became teachers or they became wives and mothers.

So her little brother, Uncle Woody, came along and he was talented. But by then the parents had passed away. So three of the oldest sort of were their parents, you know, surrogate type parents. Aunt Loretta, Uncle Morris, I remember the names of them. So they were the elder of this crowd of kids, and they were not going to see Woody go to art school. He was going to go to Ohio State University and get a business degree and become a businessman, because he was really a smart young man.

But my mother said, "Okay." She met my dad at Wright Patterson during the First World War.

JE: And his name?

JO: William John.

JE: William John O'Meilia.

JO: Uh-huh (affirmative), commonly known as Wild Bill O'Meilia, it's what he became.

JE: So they met, you said?

JO: At Wright Patterson there at Wright Field during the First World War. He flew the old Jennies. He was in the original Signal Corpse, which was the beginning of the Air Force. They would have these tea dances for the young officers and enlisted men and they'd

bring the young ladies in from the surrounding communities. That's where Dad met Mother. Here was this crazy, Shanty Irishman from Eddystone, Pennsylvania, which was South Philly on the wrong side of the track, as far as Philadelphia was concerned. Met this very sophisticated young lady.

You know, the German and the Irish seem to be a perfect match for some reason. They're called opposites attract. And Dad was a typical Irishman. We called him the James Cagney of Tulsa. He could dance, he started the Irish American Club here and was an entertainer in—we found out later that he would always emcee all the shows in the service there at Wright Patterson, which was then called Wright Field, I think, not Wright Patterson. But anyway, he was an entertainer.

JE: He was not artistic though, was he?

JO: Only with his mouth.

JE: Yeah.

JO: Okay.

JE: Did you inherit some of that?

JO: I think, yes, you're pushing me there. Okay. Mother was the talented one. So when they got married and moved to Chicago, Mother said, "One weekend we're going to drive down to Columbus, Ohio, and we're going to get my little brother Woody, and we're going to bring him up to Chicago. And I'm going to enroll him in the Chicago Art Institute."

Dad said, "Okay, George, whatever you say." And that's what they did, brought Woody to Chicago. He lived with them. Enrolled in the Chicago Art Institute, which was a great school at that time. It taught the basics, what we call the basics, drawing, painting, and picture-making.

JE: Could anybody get in?

JO: You had to submit samples, oh yeah.

JE: Okay.

JO: You worked toward the fine art degree. Things were tight then so he got a job at the *Chicago Tribune*, working at night, to help pay for his classes and so forth. Then he started doing some little cartoons, he started creating a column, while he was a student, and eventually became fascinated by boxing and baseball and things of this nature.

So when he graduated from the Chicago Art Institute, all his brothers and sisters were still mad as hell at Mother and Dad for doing this. He had a contract with the NEA Syndicate. He got syndicated right out of art school through the *Chicago Tribune*, and he was making like eight hundred, nine hundred dollars a month. And back in those days, that was a lot of money.

And then he created the sports drawings and illustrations on the sports page. He was the first George Plimpton. You've heard of Plimpton—

JE: Yeah.

JO: ...from the paper? Okay. Uncle Woody would suit up with the Yankees, he sparred with Gene Tunney and Max Smelling. He was the one that brought me a Babe Ruth baseball. Then he would do stories and illustrations. I got three original panels in my studio that I've saved over the years. Uncle Woody willed them to me after he saw this kid, you know, he's going, "Oh boy."

He used to pass through Tulsa on a train, heading to the West Coast for a ballgame or a story, and always would stop in Tulsa. Just the neatest guy. Unfortunately, he died at a very young age, he was only thirty-one.

JE: Wow.

JO: And her other brother, Uncle John, who was just twelve months older than Woody, just a few months older than my mother, because there was two mothers that raised these nine on one and nine on the other, so the total was eighteen. But anyway, Uncle John became a doctor. He died just twelve months after Uncle Woody. He locked himself up with a patient and was trying to break down measles, trying to develop a cure for measles.

The patient survived and Uncle John didn't. It just broke my mother's heart, of course.

Well, at that time, my oldest brother who is six years older than me, said, "Mom, that's okay. I'm going to become a doctor for Uncle John."

And here the little jerk O'Meilia, the youngest saying, "Well, I'm going to take Uncle Woody's place. I'm going to be an artist, okay?"

JE: You said?

JO: Yeah, I was four, five at that time, or something. I was fascinated by Uncle Woody when he would come to visit. And he would always bring something that he had done art-wise.

And Mother saw that her youngest was going to get in trouble, which he did, drawing on the side of his papers while he was supposed to be studying.

So anyway, I started studying at nine. She got me into class.

Chapter 03 – 4:05
Wild Bill

John Erling: How did they come to Oklahoma?

Jay O'Meilia: They came from Chicago. Dad had a business there and his partner burned him out. They had a fire and they had no insurance. This guy was a crook. And so Dad was broke.

Well, one of Mother's older sisters, Aunt Norma, had come to Tulsa with her husband, Uncle Al, who was an accountant for Sinclair Oil Company. He was from back East, both of them from Ohio area. Indereaden, another nice German name. Aunt Norma and Uncle Al

kept telling Mother, and particularly Dad, Uncle Al would say, "Bill, you might as well come out here since you lost everything in Chicago."

Dad was always fascinated by the oil business anyway. So they moved here, lived with Aunt Norma and Uncle Al for about six months while they got settled in.

And Dad became a manufacturer's rep. He handled industrial chemicals for a company back in New Jersey. He had part of Tulsa Paper Company here, had his office down there where now the Zero Art—when I go down there I see the old faded sign over the building, the Tulsa Paper Company. My dad's office was right there and I used to go down there on Saturdays to help them unload paper and sweep floors, et cetera.

But anyway, that's how they ended up in Tulsa and he loved it. Here was a boy from Eddystone, Pennsylvania, and he became an Oklahoman cowboy. He had the boots, he had a Stetson, and when his customers or people would come to visit from back East, he'd meet them down at the train down at the old Union Station. And he'd hire this friend of his who was part Indian. He'd get him dressed up like an Indian warrior.

When the train would be pulling in, we're standing back there and my mother is just having a fit. He would tell his buddy, "Okay, take off."

Dad would have his two six-shooters, with blanks, of course, here's this train coming in and these people sitting there looking out the window and here's go this Indian by. And then here comes this cowboy, "Bam, bam," that was my father. He was a character, that was why we called him Wild Bill.

But he loved Tulsa. My mother never did. She called Oklahoma, "Aklahoma red clay." She was from this genteel area of Ohio, and came out here in this Indian territory. We went to Christ King Parrish, and we had missionary priests that came here. She said, "We're still mission country," and it just bugged the hell out of her.

But Dad just loved it.

JE: Where did you live then, the first house you recollect in Tulsa?

JO: First house was on 1832 East 16th Place. You remember Hannah Lumber Company here, down there on 3rd and Peoria? It was built by Mr. Hannah. Dad used to sell stuff to him and he built our house, he built most of that street. It was a deadend street, now it's called a cul-de-sac, of course. They had a little island at the top of the street but it was a neat area and we were just about four blocks from St. Johns.

We all worked up there in the summertime. My oldest brother, who later became a doctor, worked there as an orderly and got involved with the hospital. My dad sold stuff to the hospital and we used to be altar boys in the chapel. We'd finish our papers during the week, delivering our *Tulsa World*, and then we'd end up over at the chapel at St. Johns as altar boys. Because my dad insisted that we did this. And he did the collection for the nuns. We grew up around St. Johns.

My brother later became chief of the interns and then he became chief of residency, when he came back from medical school, from St. Louis University in St. Louis. But anyway, he grew up around St. Johns from the time he was a kid. He was going to continue where Uncle John left off.

Chapter 04 – 6:20
Early Art Education

John Erling: In here then, the early years, where are you showing a proclivity for art?

Jay O'Meilia: Well, I just always liked it. When I was in the third grade I remember the nuns would call my mother and said, "Well, your boy is hard to handle because he doesn't follow classes too well. He's always sitting there drawing pictures."

And I'll never forget, Sister Delores, we later became great friends, much later in our life, I got the scars on my knuckles from when she would walk by and I'd be, you know, unbeknownst, and then, whack! She'd get us with the ruler. Which now she can be convicted of child abuse.

JE: Right.

JO: And then, God love her, Mrs. Gokle, Eugenia Gokle, who was a very talented young lady, moved here with her husband who later was secretary to Bill Skelly. She was very well trained from back East and she had classes for kids. My mother found her and I was eight or nine when I started studying privately with her.

Every Saturday morning, I'd go over to Mrs. Gokle's, and then we'd play football. And I'd go get my teeth busted or get something in my hand and my mother would have a fit. "You won't be able to draw."

I can't say, "I can't go play, all my friends are playing. Am I going to be called a sissy? I've already had that problem with this Philip thing." You know.

So anyway, I started studying and I worked with Mrs. Gokle all the way through to high school.

JE: But your elementary school was Marquette?

JO: Right.

JE: That's where you started?

JO: Right. And then when we got to the sixth grade, my mother had a set-to with the nuns because they didn't have any art classes or music classes at Marquette. They couldn't afford that, that was extra curricular. That was during the Depression.

But a lady, who was a member of our parish, Rosemary Sheen, God love her, she was the first woman principal at Tulsa. She was the principal at Wilson Junior High School. Wilson was seventh, eighth, and ninth grade. She and my mother were great buddies. And finally, she said, "George, when they're ready to go to the seventh grade you bring those boys because we've got great music teachers and they have these sisters out there, the Lindsey sisters, who are great art teachers."

They were well trained, they were graduates of Pratt Institute, which at that time was and still is the top professional art school back in New York. They will teach Jay just like he was going to be a professional. They have classes where they have models. We go out and do perspective drawings out there on 11th Street.

So anyway, when we all hit to go to seventh grade, Mother took us out to Wilson and just ticked off all the nuns and everybody at Marquette. We lived halfway between Central and Wilson. And when Will Rogers came along, theoretically, we should have all had to go to Will Rogers High School.

But again, Mother found out that they had a very good art teacher at Central. And so all my brothers, we all went to Central. They had the good art classes, they had good music. My oldest brother played a trumpet and the other one played a violin, and Ray played a clarinet, and I piddled on the piano.

JE: You said models, were you around live models?

JO: Yeah.

JE: Back in the early days?

JO: Junior high school. They would get costumed models like an Indian princess. The little theater would provide somebody with costuming. We'd get a pirate.

JE: How old were you when you sold your first painting?

JO: I was about eleven. A friend of my dad's, Uncle Tom, God love him, he was the senior vice president of Magnus Chemical Company, which is a company my dad represented. It was back east in New Jersey. And Uncle Tom would stop by, he would be passing through Tulsa. Dad would say, "Look at what this kid is doing."

So Uncle Tom paid me twenty-five dollars for this watercolor that I did. My next big sale, I think I was twelve, maybe, Mr. Fred LaFortune, Joe LaFortune's younger brother who Dad knew, they all went up to Christ Cave, all those fish-eaters. They started that parish: Mr. Warren, Mr. LaFortune, my dad and mom, they were the original founders of that parish.

And then Mr. LaFortune, Fred, bought this painting of a drunk under a streetlamp. Paid me seventy-five dollars, I think it was. I don't know why I don't remember it, I'm a figure nut.

Years later, I get a call from a young lady who was Fred's daughter. She had just moved back to Tulsa. Her husband was a career army officer. He had passed away so she moved

back to Tulsa. And she called me and she said, "I've carried this painting around that my father bought from you and I'd like for you to have it."

I said, "You've got to be kidding. Is that the lamppost and so forth?"

She said, "Yeah."

I said, "Well, I'll be darned."

So anyway, she brought it over and gave it back to me.

JE: Um—um, (thoughtful noises). Wow.

JO: My son, who's the writer, always thought that's Mr. Sinatra under the lamppost that Dad did. Anyway, we're going to use it in the book.

JE: Some of the work you did way back when drawings and sketching when five, six, seven years old, did anybody preserve them?

JO: Actually, I've got three originals. I just found them again. We dug these things out. One of my first, what they called *gouache*, it's opaque watercolor that Mrs. Golco had us paint with. Not oils at that time because it was for little kids. We would have been a mess.

Anyway, I've got a snow scene, and then I've got a rural landscape with a barn and stuff in it. Then I have my first oil that I painted, which was a still life with roses and a drape in the background and a window looking out on a landscape. That's hanging in my office.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

JO: It's a good size and I said, "Wow, I think I was about thirteen when I did that." The first oil I'd ever done, and I just fell in love with it. And I was a sloppy painter. It took me a long time to get organized. But, man, I was slinging that paint around, you know?

Chapter 05 – 5:30
Tulsa Central

John Erling: Then you go on to Tulsa Central High School, your high school years?

Jay O'Meilia: After Wilson. Marquette first through the sixth grade, then went to Wilson seventh, eighth, and ninth. Then went down to Central.

JE: What were your days like there at Central?

JO: Well, when I was at Wilson, our coach there at Wilson, we had played field hockey, which was soccer today. And I was fast, I was quick because I had been running away from my three older brothers ever since I was a kid. And for the summer for entertainment they would chase their kid brother around until they caught me. And then they'd cut my hair and do all kinds of crazy stuff. You know, there wasn't any television or anything, so that was their entertainment.

JE: There were four boys, then, in the O'Meilia family, is that right?

JO: Four boys.

JE: No girls.

JO: I was the youngest.

JE: Okay.

JO: Yeah. But anyway, Red Downs, the coach there, he's a neat guy, when you went to high school from junior high, if they showed any abilities in athletics or in music or in whatever it was, and I wrestled in junior high too, so he recommended I try out for the wrestling team and track, which I did.

I had to wrestle the same guy from the time I was in the seventh grade. And he would throw me against those steam radiators at Wilson, all three years. I thought I was pretty good, but he later went on, was it All-State all three years at Central? Got a full scholarship at Michigan, which was one of the top wrestling schools, was a three-time All-American, and was qualified for the Olympics. I had to wrestle this damn kid in the seventh grade.

I said, "I'm not going to wrestle at Central because I'm still going to be wrestling Richard. And there ain't no way." I said, "The scars are not healing fast enough." So I stuck to track. And I was a pretty good trackman. I was what you call a point-getter. I could run hurdles, I ran the sprints, I ran the relays, I loved to run. I hated cross-country, but we had to do that for training. But as short as I was, I could run both high and low hurdles, which always surprised everybody.

I did gymnastics too along the way so I could do tumbling.

JE: At Central?

JO: All at Central. We had this wonderful surrogate father who was our track coach, Bill Lance. The most wonderful man.

My dad traveled while we were growing up, he was gone a lot for about eight years. He would only be home four or five weeks out of a year. Because he was on the road trying to pay for these damn kids and support them. And he was from the East Coast, the West Coast, to Mexico, to Canada, and California, to New York.

So Coach Lance became just like a father figure to all of us. He started Camp Kanakuk, up in Branson, Missouri, that was one of the top camps in the country. And he would take his track boys up there. In the summertime we would be "junior counselors." And we would work taking care of these little kids, eight and nine. I could tell you some of the successful guys here that were counselors when I was a junior counselor.

Anyway, that—

JE: Any—

JO: ...was a great experience with Coach Lance.

JE: Yeah. Can you name any of the names who were there?

JO: Yeah, Sam Daniels, was one of them.

JE: Attorney now in our town.

JO: He's now an outstanding attorney. We called him Froggy, which ticked him off. He was a little athlete, but great athlete.

JE: How about in Tulsa Central? Were you able to use your artistic talent?

JO: Oh yeah. I was the art director two years of our yearbook. Art teacher, I'm trying to think of her name, she was the neatest lady. But she really was always one me. She saw what I could so she rode me really hard. She wouldn't give me a passing grade half the time. I'd have to come back after track and go back to the classroom and work on the yearbook. I'd be there until seven, eight, nine o'clock at night.

And there was a printing company across the street from Central. He was looking for somebody to draw cartoons for this little publication. So she recommended me and said, "Oh, well, I've got a young man here that is pretty talented and he could probably do those cartoons."

Well, this magazine was called the *Weekly Pumper*. It was kind of the *Esquire* magazine of Tulsa. And these jokes were a little bit, let's say, colorful? I'd get these cut lines, and then I would do these cartoons. And I got five dollars a cartoon. I don't know how many I did over the two or three years.

And Glen Wright here in town, has got this book on all of this stuff. He showed it to me, and I'm not really represented hardly in the book, but I said, "I did a bunch of those things. At five bucks a pop." Which was pretty neat at that time.

And I sold some other things. I was always hustling something between my morning round at the *Tulsa World* and my afternoon round at the *Tulsa Tribune*. And then I had my *Ladies' Home Journal*; *Liberty*; *Collier's*, I sold to all these magazines.

All of us four boys, we all did this. We all had newspaper routes, we had magazine routes, that's the way we made our allowance money.

Chapter 06 – 5:00
December 7, 1941

John Erling: You graduated in what year?

Jay O'Meilia: 'Forty-five.

JE: 'Forty-five.

JO: Yeah.

JE: So let's go back to 1941, and December 7th.

JO: I remember it as if it was yesterday. A dear friend of mine, Bill Baconeye, who lived across the street from us there on 16th Place. It was a Sunday afternoon and we went to the Orpheum Theater downtown. There was the Ritz and the Orpheum, there were great theaters downtown, and they were air-conditioned. We would make a point to go to movies as often as we could.

And I'll never forget, we'd walk downtown and back, it was no big deal. We went to the movie, came out, and there was this paperboy standing there who I knew, selling, you know, like the kid on the street? "Extra! Extra!" They started talking about Pearl Harbor.

And we said, "Pearl Harbor? What's Pearl Harbor?"

Here was this kid standing there with his papers saying, "Extra! Jay, guess what? They had this bombing. We're invaded!"

I said, "What are you talking about?"

"Pearl Harbor."

That started it. That was '41. My two oldest brothers had just graduated from Central in '40. My second oldest brother skipped two grades, which ticked off my older brother, and graduated the same year as his older brother, who was two years old.

That side story, he asked my dad, he said, "How come Rally's graduating with me? He's just a kid, he's two years younger than me."

Dad said, "I hate to tell you, Bill, but he's smarter than you."

My brother was a mathematical genius. He graduated at sixteen. But he went with the submarines.

My older brother went to medical school, but he was in the ASTP, which is the army division where they could go to college for Navy or Marines or Army, and so forth. But you had to put in four years.

And then my brother next to me, went into the navy. He was on an ATP.

JE: What did you remember the days and months then afterward, like rationing and that type of thing?

JO: Oh boy. That was interesting how there were two summer camps that got gas rationing stamps for people. One was in Minnesota, and then Camp Kanakuk in Branson, Missouri, because they kept those camps open for kids like us. And they got gas rationing stamps so they could drive, the parents could get their kids to them.

My dad was one of the few that got gas rationing stamps because he was a salesman. And he did some contracts, sold stuff to the military, got involved in Fort Sill and places selling his products. He was one of the few in our neighborhood that had gas rationing stamps. He was the one that loaded up all the kids, took us to school, picked us up, all that, when he was in town, that was.

You had this thing on your windshield, whether it was an A or a B or a C stamp, depending on the qualification of how much gas you could get. We had food drives. We started a garden out in the backyard and raised things.

JE: Were they victory gardens?

JO: Victory gardens, yeah.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JO: My mother went down and got a job. She'd never worked in her life, she was raising four boys. But they were looking for people at the Corps of Engineers. She went down there and later became running an office. As I said, she was a matriarch type leader.

And I remember, there was a company here that I got to know later, the two owners though, the Zelickson boys, they worked with my mother down there. They said, "Your mother was like a top sergeant. Boy, she kept everything humming and she watched the pennies." He said, "The money was in good hands when George O'Meilia was in charge of the financing.

But anyway, she worked down there during the war. Just bugged the heck out of my dad. "George, you don't have to work."

And she says, "I'm doing my war effort." Plus she got paid doing it. She worked there for about four years, I guess.

JE: The three boys that were in the service—

JO: Yeah.

JE: ...were there concerns about their lives and where they would be going? So that was kind of a conversation at home?

JO: Oh boy, was it ever. The first reason she had to get a job, to keep her mind busy, because her boys—I didn't go in until the tail end, '45, I went in right after I got out of high school. I enlisted because a friend of my dad's who was head of the recruiting office here, said, "Have him put a packet of some of his artwork together. There's a department in the Navy that we can submit this work of his. And maybe if he enlists and goes through boot camp, by the time he gets out of boot camp, there's an art department that he can maybe qualify for."

Which is what I did.

Chapter 07 – 4:00
Loaned a Gift

John Erling: In New York, you took art lessons.

Jay O'Meilia: Yeah.

JE: And what school was that?

JO: The Art Students' League. It's like the Julliard of the visual arts. It's a professional training school, basically. You don't get a degree and they don't care whether you come to class or not. It's guys who have gone and gotten a master's degree at a college and didn't learn a damn thing. And they come to the Art Students' League, because all the teachers—they weren't called professors, but they were all professionals in their field, whether it was sculpting, painting, whatever it was. And they would teach two days a week. They would come in only two days a week, and then they would have what you call a monitor, which was their assistant, who would be there the other time.

They would give you enough in those two days to keep you busy for seven days. But it was hard, from seven thirty, eight o'clock in the morning, until I would finish up that afternoon at sketch class, which was about forty-five minutes.

And then I had part-time job three nights a week that I'd work from midnight to four in the morning doing launching watch ads.

JE: You'd draw them?

JO: I'd draw a watching—

JE: For their ads?

JO: For their ads, yeah.

JE: In the national magazines?

JO: For the local, for the *New York Times*, or whichever the publication there. I made four dollars an hour.

JE: And that was the watch at the moment, Longine.

JO: Oh yeah.

JE: It's no longer today that name.

JO: No.

JE: But it was big then.

JO: My instructor there knew that I needed to make extra money. Dad would, with four boys going to college and all this stuff, we all got twenty-five dollars a month. And whatever else you got you earned it yourself. See, he wanted to know just how bad did you want to do this. To all my brothers, including the one who wanted to be a doctor. That was just his way of saying, "You really want to do this? Let's see how bad you want to do this."

JE: You were really good. Did that help you in your self-esteem, ego, anything? I mean, you were obviously a good artist.

JO: I wouldn't say I was—I had desire. I was loaned a gift, okay? Got it through my uncle, my mother, those genes, but I had a tremendous desire to want to do it. Because I enjoyed doing it. And it drove my dad nuts because he wondered, "How the hell you going to make a living?"

I said, "Here's your oldest son that's a brilliant doctor. Your next son has 150 people working for him." He was running the city of North Palm Beach and does all of the construction and everything. "Your next son owns two banks. And me. Now what do you want? Three out of four." I said, "That's the best odds you can get, you know."

He said, "You little jerk." And he was so proud of me, later, later. But he wanted to see just how bad I wanted to do this.

I remember he and Mom came up one time to New York, when I was studying, and Mr. Brackman, Robert Brackman, one of my professors, who later did Jennifer Jones in the movie, *Portrait of Jennie*. Did her portrait for that movie.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

JO: And I got to watch. Anyway, he and Mr. Brackman, they were both about the same height, they were both about five-five, five-six.

I'll never forget, Dad said, "Robert, does this kid got any talent? How's he doing?"

He said, "Bill, don't worry about it. He's not the best in the class but he's got the work ethic, he is not afraid to work."

And Dad said, "That's the way he grew up. He had to."

Mr. Brackman said, "He's like a turtle, he just plods along. He plods along where a couple of the other guys are so talented in this class. But Jay is going to do just fine because he's got the desire and the work ethic to do it." And he said, "You can't ask for anything else."

JE: Right.

JO: He said, "I've seen so many that were very, very talented that failed because they didn't work at it."

Chapter 08 – 3:15
Norman Rockwell

John Erling: Along about that time, the great illustrator for *Saturday Evening Post*, Norman Rockwell—

Jay O'Meilia: Oh yeah.

JE: ...was a big name.

JO: Yeah. One of my instructors, Frank Riley, was a very close friend of Mr. Rockwell's. So once a month, Mr. Rockwell would entertain us with a talk at the Society of Illustrators.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

JO: We'd get to go over there and Mr. Rockwell would come. There'd be about thirty of us.

And he'd say, "Well, gee, guys, I—" very shy, very humble, light as pie, "I'm not sure what I could—" An hour and a half later, we're there with our mouths just dropped, listening to him converse about his background and his stories and so forth.

And I thought, "Boy, if I could just do half as well as he does." But he inspired the hell out of us.

JE: Do you remember any stories that Norman Rockwell told you about *Saturday Evening Post* covers?

JO: Yeah. The most important one was when he did that great cover of the baseball player. He used a pallet knife and he did some more, what we call *paintery* effects on this *Post* cover. So he delivers it to the art director, his buddy who he had been doing work for, he was a famous art director, well-known, well respected. And he and Rockwell were just like brothers.

Rockwell brought that thing in on Monday morning. And he looked at it and he said, "Norman, that's a hell of a great cover. But don't ever use that and don't ever do that again or you'll never do another *Post* cover."

Because he used some what we call more *paintery* than rendering type effects. More thicker painting and stuff. Most of the illustrators were delineators, we called them. Rockwell was a real painter who became an illustrator.

Frederick Remington was a great painter who started as an illustrator but they could draw, paint, and make pictures. They were highly trained. They trained as fine artists, like I was. But they had to make a living, so they got into the "commercial end of art." At that time, illustration was just a wonderful, wonderful field for painters. And then later, of course, the camera took over.

But my era, I was there at the height of that era, which was great. But Rockwell would tell stories about some of his models, some of the stories that he experienced. And, God love him, you know, he had a very sad private life.

JE: Really?

JO: Oh. They were coming back from Europe, one of the few times he took a real vacation, he and his wife, and halfway across the Atlantic they were standing looking out over the water, and she said, "Norman, I want a divorce." And he had four boys. And they all were misfits, or didn't accomplish much.

In my field, that's one thing I observed, I'm never going to let my career interfere with my private life and my family. I said, "I'm not going to let that happen to me."

Chapter 09 – 1:55
Scholarship to Yale

John Erling: You actually got a scholarship to Yale, didn't you?

Jay O'Meilia: Yeah. Mr. Brackman was the one that recommended me. He knew the dean of the art school at Yale, and he said, "Now I never got an art degree and I want you to get an art degree. And we're going up this next weekend."

Mr. Brackman lived in Connecticut near Yale. He lived in Lyme, Connecticut.

JE: A scholarship to Yale is a pretty big deal. You didn't follow that through?

JO: Well, no.

JE: Why?

JO: I went up there and I went to see the art classes. They took me to a couple of studios and I saw what they were doing. And I said, "Mr. Brackman, I'm not going to come here. They're teaching your last night's nightmare."

This was after the Second World War, with the beginning of the abstract. That's when the art schools were starting to eliminate the basic fundamentals of drawing, painting, and picture-making. And they were bringing these people in that were teaching, "Well, just do your thing. What you feel."

I was in the class, I happened to walk into this one and the professor was giving them an assignment and he was going to be back for about two months. So he assigned these things to paint, no instruction, and then he'd be back to critique them in a couple of months. And I said, "Whoa, no, I've been studying since I was nine years of age." And I said, "I know what I want and mainly I know what I need in my field, and this is not it."

"You're going to turn down that scholarship?"

And I said, "Yep." The only guy that I know that came out of there that became a very successful guy, he was a member of the American Watercolor Society, where I became a member, which was quite an honor. There's only about three hundred of us in the country. He became a very successful egg painter like Andrew Wyeth worked in egg tempera. And how he got the background going through that Yale school is be— but that happens.

Chapter 10 – 2:15
Korean War

John Erling: You were married then in what year?

Jay O'Meilia: Nineteen fifty-one.

JE: But—

JO: I was called back in the Navy.

JE: Because the Korean War had broke out?

JO: Yes sir. And I was frozen from the Second World War because I had clearance, I was cleared for top secret. So when I got out of the navy the first time, I threw my hat over the fence and this full commander buddy of mine says, "O'Meilia, you're still in the navy."

I said, "No sir, I'm not."

He said, "You're frozen in the reserves. Did you read all that stuff on that?"

And I said, "No sir, but I'm out of the navy."

He said, "Yeah, you're out of the regular navy, but you're now frozen in the reserves."

So I got back home. Monday nights I went out to the naval reserve unit here. And then every summer I went two weeks back to DC. And then the Korean War broke out. And ten days after the Korean War broke out I was ordered back into service.

JE: How many years did you do then?

JO: Twenty-one months.

JE: You were discharged then in 1953.

JO: Yeah. Got out in, I think, May. I'll never forget, I had to go to Oklahoma City to report in. I left Oklahoma City the morning of July 4, 1951, heading for DC in my little station wagon. I was back in and Jodie, my wife, would come up and visit on the weekends because she was with Service Pipeline.

Mr. Berth is CEO. He was a good friend of her father's and really liked Jodie, everybody liked Jodie. So he'd make these trips to Washington on business. So he would say, "Jodie, I'm going to DC, you want to go up and see Jay? I'll put you up at the Mayflower." He always stayed at the Mayflower.

I'd meet them out at the airport and we'd have a weekend and then she'd go back with him. She did that four or five times.

We were sitting in the bar of the Mayflower Hotel when we decided, she said, "Are we going to get married or what?"

And I said, "Well, Hon, you just make all the arrangements and I'll be there." You know? I said, "If I can get a leave."

So we got married on December 29, 1951. I got Christmas leave.

Chapter 11 – 2:27
Art Studios in Tulsa

John Erling: So then you're discharged in '53 and then you come to Tulsa.

Jay O'Meilia: Came back to Tulsa, yep.

JE: And then what did you do?

JO: Well, I started my career and I started freelancing, set up a studio. One of my brothers, the second older, Rally, we built a studio on to my folks home out on 37th and Victor. Then '43, we moved from 16th Place to out on 3706 South Victor, which was at that time, out in the country. There were probably maybe six houses or something in that whole area off of Eudica, which dead-ended about 36th or 37th.

But anyway, we built a studio on my folks' house there, had a neat, big, north window and so forth. Then we rented an apartment over on 41st. They used to have what they call these garden apartments, they were really neat, where the McGraw Headquarters built a building now. There used to be garden apartments back in there and all these young ex-GIs and young couples, I had a three-bedroom apartment there. I used one bedroom as a studio. Then I had that other one at my folks' for other stuff.

So I was just out hustling. I met some people, art directors around. One of my biggest thing was the Loingure family, who owned the *Oil and Gas Journal* all went to Christ the King. I met Mr. Loingure, his sons, and his sweet wife. So I got to do some covers for the *Oil and Gas Journal*, which was a big deal, full color.

Then I got hooked up with Ford *Time* magazine. About three of us went together and had a studio downtown, we're all doing commercial illustrations and layouts and stuff for the different small advertising agencies that were here at that time. There weren't many.

Then I was doing portraits. Then I started teaching some classes, anything to make a buck.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JO: You know?

JE: So this would have been in the '60s?

JO: Started in '53, '54.

JE: All right.

JO: Yeah. I first taught over at Philbrook, set up the first art classes at Philbrook. Because I started at Philbrook in 1939, I was one of their first students. And they brought this man and wife team to Tulsa to start art classes.

Then I came back after the Korean War and Victor Hurt, who was then the director of Philbrook, asked me to have some classes over there.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

JO: You know.

JE: First a student and then become a teacher there.

JO: Yeah.

JE: That was neat.

JO: Yeah.

Chapter 12 – 3:30
President John F. Kennedy

John Erling: Bringing you up to the mid '60s, we're getting ready to observe the fiftieth anniversary of the assassination of JFK.

Jay O'Meilia: Right.

JE: So November 22, 1963, do you remember that day?

JO: Yes. Oh boy, do I. I was working in the studio, had the radio on, and this announcer just was almost crying. It was like when they had the twin towers in New York when I walked in and my son called me. It was stunning. "They what?" Because I knew President Kennedy when I was stationed in DC during the Korean War.

This is a sidebar here, but since we were all cleared for top secret we would be ordered to be security for the embassy when they would have big functions. And they would bring some of us in, in civilian clothes, but we would be armed.

I'll never forget, we were shutting this party down and it was like one o'clock in the morning. All of a sudden, some guy came and said, "Don't leave yet. There's a VIP party coming so you've got to open the bar up again."

And I said, "Oh boy." Part of my duty was to be near the bar. I could see outside of the bar, faced out onto the street. I saw these two limos, big limos drive up and all these gals and guys are pouring out of that thing. And there was a Kennedy, John Kennedy and his entourage. And his little brother Bobby.

So we were there until about four in the morning, or something like that.

JE: So you watched them party then?

JO: Aha, oh yeah, oh yeah, yeah, we had to protect them. We had to be security for them.

John Kennedy said, "Excuse me, uh, wouldn't you like to have a drink?"

I said, "I can't, sir."

He said, "Oh, are you security?"

I said, "Yes sir."

"Let's see your weapon."

I said, "I can't do that, sir. If I touch it I'll have to use it."

He said, "Really?"

I said, "That's the way we're trained. I can show it to you," and I showed it to him.

He said, "Ah, a 45."

I said, "Yeah, it kicks like crazy, but that's what they assigned us." I said, "I like my old Twin, myself."

He said, "Your twin?"

I said, "Yeah, my Smith and Wesson." Which I, by the way, still have that I brought back with me. I said, "That long barrel, I love." I said, "This damn 45, it kicks so much." And I said, "It's hard to break down and put back together again."

He said, "Do you still have to do that?"

And I said, "Yes, sir, we certainly do."

He said, "Well, let's have a drink."

I said, "Oh you're ordering me to? Yes sir, I'm going to have a Dewar's and water. Thank you, sir."

JE: When would that have taken place, what year?

JO: That would have been about too long after I was get out, it was like mid '53, maybe.

JE: John Kennedy, at that time, was obviously very friendly, just an average guy.

JO: Yeah, I know that there were quite a few nice looking young ladies in the party. Because there were two limos, I remember them pulling up. And I said, "Wow! We got some VIPs coming or something." There was probably ten in the party, I guess.

JE: Yeah. So then, November 22, '63, that memory came back rushing to you?

JO: Oh boy, did it ever.

Chapter 13 – 2:52
Garage Studio

John Erling: The present house you live in, when did you move into that home?

Jay O'Meilia: March of 1965. Because our fifth child was on its way and we had run out of bedrooms on my other house on Victor, which was just a block down from where I had grown up and had built on a neat Hollywood version studio there. A big cathedral ceiling and the whole bit. But we ran out of bedrooms.

Frannie, my youngest, was on the way. I used to deliver papers in that area. The thing was that Jodie was ill and she was in the hospital. So my brother-in-law, Charlie Gotwalls and his sweet wife, who is my wife's older sister, Mary Fran Brownley, lived at

1108 Woodward Boulevard. I hadn't been over in that area since I was a kid delivering papers in that area and my brothers.

So anyway, they had me over for dinner. And I left and I was living at this place at 38th and Victor, so I was heading out. And I said, "You know, I haven't been down in Norfork in I can't remember when." I drove down and I saw this sign on the corner of Norfork and Sunset Drive. The house was for sale, and that's when I was curious because I knew the house, I knew the family. It was Larkin Oil Company people, you know. That whole area.

JE: Wasn't the most attractive part to you the garage?

JO: Yes, the three-car garage.

JE: Because you saw that.

JO: I knew about that from delivering because I used to ride my bicycle and either throw the paper and go down the side drive and out the other to Norfork, down Sunset. So I knew the house. And I knew that big garage with an apartment above it.

And that's when I called this realtor buddy of mine, so we went to look at it. And I said, "Now let's pull up in back here."

She said, "No, I want to see the front."

And I said, "Well, I know what the front looks like." And it was almost the exact floor plan that Jodie, my wife, grew up in over on Newport. They had the big entry hall with the staircase, dining room on the left, living room on the right. This house was exactly on the flip of what Jodie grew up in. I said, "I don't want her to see this yet until I got a look back here first."

Jodie said, "Just humor him."

So I went in and looked at the three-car garage—

JE: Garage.

JO: Because there was a side door there that I could go in. I looked around, there was a wall with just a small opening on this one car garage part looked into there. And then I said, "Eww, yeah." Came back out, I said, "Okay, now we're going to look at the house." Because I wanted to be sure that this would pay for that up front.

JE: So that became your studio.

JO: Yep.

JE: To this very day.

JO: To this very day.

JE: Right.

JO: So in '65, yep.

JE: In that studio, let me bring out some things.

Chapter 14 – 7:50
Uwe – Kick Print

John Erling: You did the Kick Print for Ohio State University of Oklahoma.

Jay O'Meilia: Right.

JE: Tell us about the Kick Print and Uwe von Schamann.

JO: Well, it was one of those moments where I knew this was going to be a classic, knowing the Switzer magic. And I'll never forget, Dean Blevitts who was the quarterback and had been hurt. He had been out of, oh, about three or four games or something because of some kind of an injury he had. Because he was slated to be their number one quarterback. Dean is one hell of a an athlete. You know, he can play basketball, throw you a football. He came off the bench and directed the receiver. He hit him for a couple of passes, got him down to put him in position. Switzer called a time out, called old Uwe over and he said, "Son, three seconds is all we got. This is all the marbles."

Uwe says, "Don't worry about it, Coach."

That's when, uh, neat Ohio State coach—

JE: Woody Hayes.

JO: Woody Hayes, yeah, called another time out and tried to freeze Uwe. That's when Uwe started directing the chants, called out, "Defense, defense, blah, blah, blah!" And there's Uwe standing there in the middle of the field directing the ensemble. He was cool under fire. And it was at Columbus.

JE: It was at Ohio State.

JO: Yeah.

JE: How many yards out was he?

JO: Forty-one yards.

JE: Forty-one yards.

JO: Forty-one, the kick, and that ball, when it left his foot, hell, it was still going. It could have been fifty or sixty yards. It cleared and it went way up into the stands and there was one kid from Ohio State. This kid got around Victor Hicks, who was one of the blockers. Switzer said, "Uwe, you know normally we kick seven yards back from center. Would it bother you if I tell Mark Lucky," who was the deep snapper, "to move it back an extra yard and you kick eight yards back instead of seven?"

Uwe said, "Coach, I don't care if you move it back twelve yards. I am ready to do it."

They moved it back one extra yard and this kid from Ohio State broke through right after the ball ? [time 2:23] this kid just barely missed it. He hit the ground and sprained both of his wrists because he got around there and he was just determined to block that

thing. If it had still been at seven yards, he would have. And he just barely missed that.

I mean, that's how great Switzer was as a coach. I mean, he anticipated and asked, "Would it bother you if we moved it back an extra yard?" The rest is history, you know. This is a big, big win for us. The game was September 24, 1977.

JE: In that moment that you saw it—

JO: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: Did you think, "That's a picture"?

JO: I had the sketch within a half hour. I'd already sketched it out, called, they did kicking assignments on Thursday afternoon, it was always in the afternoon, and I asked Coach if I could come in and, "Would you set up the blocking assignments the same it was at the game?"

He said, "Why?"

I said, "I want to do a painting of it."

"Yeah, okay, O'Meilia, all right, okay."

So they set up and Uwe went through his motions and they had the same, the set. OU players is the Ohio State players, pretty much recreated the whole scene for me. And the interesting part was, it's never been really explained but a neat young photographer for *Sports Illustrated*, who was out of, I think, Wichita, he was a great sports photographer. He was there that Thursday afternoon because the cover of *Sports Illustrated* came out with the shot of Uwe kicking the field goal. And he saw my sketch, that I had already done a half hour after the game.

He said, "What did you do? Get a copy of this early?"

And I said, "What are you talking about?"

He said, "Well, have you seen the cover of the *Sports Illustrated*?"

And I said, "No."

So he came to bring it to Barry and some of the coaches and stuff. I said, "Well, I'll be damned, you got the same idea I've got."

He said, "No, you stole my idea."

I said, "I had this drawn a half hour after the game. I have witnesses that saw me do it. I think your cover is wonderful, but I had it sketched out before you. Okay? And I'm going to do and create a painting of this."

"Well, you can't do that."

I said, "Watch me. You don't have the license on this."

Way back then people accused me and I said, "It just makes it more interesting." And so we had a big unveiling at the student union. I unveiled the painting and an order blanks for the prints that I was going to produce, which I had not produced but I just had the original there. We put on a real dog and pony show. All my buddies from ABC, who I'd worked with over the years, all came to the function because they heard about O'Meilia is going to have this big thing.

So I put on a full bar, food, and my brother, who I got to put three other guys together from Ponca City. He called me that night of that game, my brother, who was an OSU graduate. I said, "Raymond, can you arrange about $30,000?" I told him what I wanted to do.

And he said, "I've got it, baby, it's done."

In fact, we had to include one extra doctor buddy of his from Ponca City. He said, "Well, if you don't let me in on this, I'm going to take my money out of your brother's bank."

And I said, "Oh you're in, we'll take your five." You know.

We put on a feast unveiling. And my poor wife, Jodie, I said, "Now here are these order blanks, Honey. Now, see if people might want to order them."

So we had the big unveiling, Uwe was there, Barry was up on the blah, blah and did all that. And these people started lining up in front of poor Jodie, at five hundred bucks a pop. Some of them were writing checks for five hundred. Credit cards for five hundred. And she was writing these down.

I think we had a hundred orders that night at five hundred bucks a pop. And my brother and Sam Daniels, who was my brother's partner in these banks, Sam was in on this deal with his five thousand. He said, "You know, this is the first time I ever got involved in one of these damn things and we're going to make money. We're actually going to make a profit."

I said, "Sambo, that's the idea. Okay?"

He got such a kick out of it. And they got a percentage, the schools got a percentage, I got a percentage, but I'd already been paid up front to do the painting.

I went out to California for two weeks to produce the serigraphs. They are fourteen-color serigraphs, they're handmade, and I had to do an overlay for each color. And had this thing set up within a thousandth of an inch correction. And they would produce each one of these, and then it would dry and they'd put it back in, fourteen times. It's called the Rolls Royce of prints. It's by hand and I hired a young lady out there who was an art student who helped me pull these screens and the colors and so forth. It was quite a project.

JE: The Uwe von Schamann kick.

JO: Uwe and I became—yeah, and we would run into each other every once in a while. And he's such a neat guy.

Chapter 15 – 1:50
Sports, Color, Splash

John Erling: Did you ever meet Bud Wilkinson?

Jay O'Meilia: Oh yes.

JE: University of Oklahoma captured your attention, I think, back in 1950, when you attended an OU/Texas game in Dallas.

JO: Correct. That was the first experience that blew my mind, yeah.

JE: Why?

JO: Because it was so colorful and I really wasn't into football that much. This good friend of mine, he was an OU graduate, so he got tickets and we went to the game. And I'm sitting there, I see this number 35 running up and down the field. And I said, "Who the hell is this 35 kid?"

He said, "Don't you know who that is?"

I said, "No, that's why I'm asking you."

"He's from Cleveland, Oklahoma. His name is Billy Vessels."

I said, "Boy, he is quite a player, isn't he?"

Well, later, Vessels breaks his leg, then he's gone for almost one year. And he was the roommate of a very dear friend of mine, Howard Stover, who I grew up with here in Tulsa. Howard would take him around on his crutches and so forth, and they became very close.

But anyway, I just said, "Man, that's exciting." And I could see why my Uncle Woody got so entrenched and excited about sports as an art medium, as a subject. Because I said, "It's colorful, it's exciting. It's like when I did oil field scenes." I said, "It's like a ballet in so many ways. I mean, this unified chaos with the color and the splash and the movement."

And I always liked movement. That's why I always doing racehorse paintings because of the speed and the movement of it. And football was just the ultimate of gladiators, great athletes, great environment.

Chapter 16 – 7:50
University of Tulsa – Notre Dame

John Erling: This cast you as a sports artist, is what it did. You began to, or continued on, specializing in that.

Jay O'Meilia: Well, yeah, sports just appealed to me as a subject matter. And I guess my genes, because my Uncle Woody was really the first sports artist and I saw things when I was a kid, artwork, of sports. It kind of just stuck in me, I guess, and I did a lot of other things.

JE: Now let me just go through here.

JO: All right.

JE: A few of these and you can make a comment about them. You did the official 1980 US Open portrait?

JO: Correct.

JE: You had done the '58 US Open painting of Southern Hills.

JO: Right.

JE: And the program cover of the 1970 PGA at Southern Hills of Arnold Palmer and Billy Casper.

JO: Right.

JE: Were you around those guys any?

JO: Oh yeah.

JE: Arnold Palmer and Billy Casper?

JO: Oh yeah.

JE: What were they like to be around?

JO: Well, just typical golfers, great pros, they were great party boys, except for Nicklaus.

JE: What do you mean, except for Nicklaus?

JO: Well, he was more straight-laced, I would say. I mean, he was more focused, he was from Ohio.

JE: Okay.

JO: He was an Ohio State boy and he was much more of a dedicated, full-time golfer, where Palmer and Casper and those guys, they were more fun-loving. And they were more loosey-goosey. Nicklaus knew that he was going to be a legacy.

JE: Probably didn't drink as much as the others did?

JO: He didn't drink as much as the other ones, right.

JE: Right. You did the official poster of the 2001 US Open at Southern Hills.

JO: Right.

JE: And then, jumping back in years, the NIT championship in 1981. This is when Tulsa University won the NIT with—

JO: Yeah, with great Nolan Richardson.

JE: Nolan Richardson.

JO: Uh-huh (affirmative).

JE: He did T—

JO: Paul Pressey.

JE: And Paul Pressey, right. T—

JO: We called him the rubber band man.

JE: And TU's victory over Notre Dame in 2010, were you there for that?

JO: Yes sir. I was on the sideline. Oh boy, was I ever. That's when Bubba Cunningham, who was the AD at the time, it was just finishing up the second quarter, almost the half time, and he walked by. And I said, "Bubba, we're going to win this thing."

And he said, "Shut up, O'Meilia!"

I said, "We're beating them in the trenches and we're faster than they are."

Around the beginning of the fourth quarter, he came back by, said, "Keep that thought."

I said, "Hell, it's set, man." I said, "Watch this, this is going to be a crazy—this is another win." I said, "I get this gut feeling. I had it at this game, I had it at the Ohio State game. I picked Nicklaus in 1980, when he won the US Open at Baltusrol against Aoki, the great Japanese player." I followed and I said, "Jack's going to win this thing." He came out of the woodwork with at Lee Trevino and all that great grou—you talk about a party boy, whee-hee.

Anyway, the game at Notre Dame was, again, a classic. David slew Goliath, you know. And I did the sculpture before, it's called *Salute*. Bubba Cunningham came up with this idea and he tried it when he was at Notre Dame as an assistant athletic director.

That's how we got to play Notre Dame, by the way. He knew the AD at Notre Dame. And over a few adult beverages, Bubba conned him into getting TU to play Notre Dame, which was a coup.

Anyway, he had this idea when he was up there, and he said, "I couldn't find any artists or anybody that would come up with anything." And he said, "Finally this one guy, there in South Bend, oh yeah, that's a great idea."

Well, he never did anything with it. And then Bubba went to Ball State and ran that program. Did a beautiful job. Then he came to TU. We got to know each other. I brought him out to play tennis, he's a good athlete. I'll put it that way. He was on the Notre Dame golf team.

So anyway, he said, "You know, Jay, I've had this idea," and he told me this story.

I said, "Hmm, I'll work up something for you."

He said, "Yeah, I've heard that before."

Well, ten days later I called him. I said, "I got something to show you." And I did this big rendering of the *Salute*. And it's an offensive lineman as they do the holding their helmets up when they have kickoffs, you know, it's a symbol.

He looked, and he said, "Damn, that's it." So we did a sculpture of it. Around the base is the history of TU, highlights of their career. And on the other side, Notre Dame and all their highlights of their fabulous background. All that was incorporated into the base.

Bubba came up with this idea, they wanted to present one to Notre Dame as a thank you for having little TU come up to South Bend to play. So they decided we'd cast up two of them.

And the equipment manager from TU called me and said, "That equipment truck is leaving in about three hours. Could you bring that other sculpture out here?"

And I said, "Why?'

And he said, "Well, Bubba's got this idea of presenting one to Notre Dame." Which already was boxed and going there.

But we thought, just in case we might win this ballgame, wouldn't it be neat to unveil that for the kids in the locker room? And that's what we did.

Arnett, great player for TU, great defensive player, knocked out their quarterback in the first quarter. Cold-cocked him on the sideline. So they brought in this freshman. Well, coaching, when they study the game film, they're coaching against that quarterback in the way his tendencies are. And they didn't even know about this kid, who was a freshman.

He threw four touchdown passes and the last thirty-six seconds, they got down to about the ten-yard line. All they had to do was have one play to the middle. It was over on the side marker, all they had to have one play, just move the guy over to the middle. And they had one of the best kickers in the country, chip shot. Wins the ballgame by one. What did they do? The young freshman quarterback threw a pass and his arm, you could just tell, froze.

Later, in the locker room, we were in there with the press corps, this was Kelly's first year there as head coach at Notre Dame. Then a reporter said, "Coach, what in the world were you thinking of having that play instead of just moving it one more down and then kick a field goal and win the ballgame?"

He said, "Well, the coaches all decided we have a six-three All-American receiver. They have a five-nine defensive back. All he has to do is throw that ball up and our six-three receiver will win the ballgame and he's in the end zone."

We didn't count on that our freshman quarterback's arm froze. That was the difference, 28-27.

And I had this gut feeling when I saw that TU and Notre Dame were going to play. I just said, "I'm going to that ballgame. I'm going to be there."

JE: So then they won, and this is in 2010, again. That sculpture then, that extra one that was sent, what became of that?

JO: Well, we presented one to the great president Steadman Upham when he first retired. They had an unveiling on the stage and unveiled the thing. We gave one to him. TU's got one, one's in the coach's office. And one's at Notre Dame.

JE: And again, that's the sculpture of?

JO: *Salute.*

Chapter 17 – 2:40
Five Media

John Erling: Not every artist goes from watercolor, oil, to sculpting, do they?

Jay O'Meilia: No.

JE: And how did you do that?

JO: Well, by necessity, in a lot of ways. I had an exhibition of my work. Somebody said, "O'Meilia, it looks like five people did your work. The variety of style and so forth."

And I said, "Yep, the secret is I have five children. So I have a medium for each child. That's the way they get to eat regularly, because my oldest—oil, my next—watercolor, my next are prints and lithographs, the next is acrylic, and the youngest is sculpture."

They said, "You've got to be kidding me."

And I said, "No, I'm a jack of all trades, I'm a journeyman in the art field." I said, "I'm fascinated by these mediums because the commercial way to really be successful is to be one medium, one style, that everybody recognizes from ten feet to a hundred feet." But I said, "I would be bored if I just known as a watercolorist or as a painter or as a sculptor because I enjoy the hell out of the variety and the challenge." I said, "I was trained to be a painter, a sculptor. I was trained in drawing, painting, picture-making, and three dimensional." And I said, "I'm just nutty enough that I enjoy the challenge and the variety." Because I would have been bored to tears.

I was known as a watercolorist for years. A member of the American Watercolor Society since '65. I don't do too many watercolors; I do a lot of them when I'm preparing an idea. I use it in sketches. But I said, "I had a happy addiction of all these mediums." You know?

It's not commercially smart because I could never be typed. Galleries hated me because I wouldn't produce more work for them. Because I was getting commissions. I'm a commission painter primarily, have been for thirty-some years.

JE: And that means you take orders.

JO: That's right. Somebody writes a check—I get creative. That's what I do for a living, it's not a game with me, it's a way that I pay my bills and enjoy a reasonably decent life and help to raise my five children. I'm a daddy and that's the most important thing to me.

Chapter 18 – 1:30
Sculptural Heroes

John Erling: Who are your sculptural heroes?

Jay O'Meilia: Going back, Auguste Rodin, Michelangelo, Augustus Saint-Gaudens, the great American sculptor. Augustus Saint-Gaudens, he did great pieces in the United States, all over. He was the Michelangelo of the United States, I would say. The movie, *Glory*, the white colonel who commanded a black battalion in the Civil War, he was commissioned to do a sculpture of that. It's unbelievable. It took him fourteen years. I've seen the original, it's huge. All these figures and he's on his horse, and then all these young black soldiers.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

JO: And they used it in the movie, at the end of the movie, I remember. I said, "I'm going to watch that movie to see if they give credit to that," and they did, right at the end.

JE: Yeah.

JO: Frederic Remington, love Frederic Remington. The emotion, the action, just like me, he was never trained as a sculptor. He was trained as a painter, but he became a damn good sculptor.

And then George Carlson, contemporary sculptor, Grant Speed, great western sculptor, pretty good names to admire and study. And I studied the hell out of them.

Chapter 19 – 10:00
Frank Sinatra

John Erling: Frank Sinatra, did you ever meet him?

Jay O'Meilia: Yep.

JE: Tell us about him.

JO: Well, I followed him from 1945, to be exact. I was there in the navy, New York City, walking down Broadway, a little sailor boy. And the Paramount Theater had this movie, and I forget the movie, what the name of it was, and I'd never been there. And I saw that they had a stage show in between the movies. I thought, "Eww, that's kind of neat, vaudeville type thing."

So I go to the movie and the show's over, the theater darkens, all of a sudden, the drapes pull back and the stage rises up. And here's Tommy Dorsey and his band and this young, skinny kid who they introduced who was going to do some songs for them and with that trio. I forget the name of the trio he sang with too at that time.

His voice just blew me away. He was dressed like a—I told him this years later, looked like a race cout [time 1:01] at a racetrack. He had a plaid coat on, I'll never forget, a polka dot tie, a striped shirt, and baggy pants, and this curly, funny hair. He opened his mouth and I'm thinking, "I have not heard a voice like that." I love singing and had a great appreciation for a voice. And it just blew me away.

Then I started following him across the country. Wherever I was, I saw him in Chicago, like Nat King Cole at the Pump Room, the Sands in Las Vegas, twice. That's where I met him. A friend of mine's buddy was a pit boss there at the Sands. And I said, "See if you can get us tickets to the Sinatra show."

He said, "I've already booked it for four of us."

And I said, "Are we down?"

He said, "We're right down front center."

Well, we get down there, we pass all these people still standing in line waiting to get in. We got ushered right by, VIP right then. We were right there. Here's the stage. Sinatra comes on, I have a sketch pad with me, of course. So during the show I made a couple of sketches, and that's when he was singing, "Nancy with the Laughing Face," in honor of his sweet daughter.

And who walks out? People started laughing, and here comes Dean Martin. Now here was this forty-piece orchestra, violin section, brass, I mean, just a fabulous backup and here's this voice. And then here comes Dean Martin playing his act. He didn't drink, by the way. I can tell you a story about him.

They go into their little patter, go back and forth, then they sing a couple of duets. I made some sketches of it.

Well, his waiter kept coming by, and kept looking. This friend of mine over said, "That's what he does."

He said, "Could I show that to Mr. Sinatra?"

I said, "Oh hell, no, come on."

He said, "I'd like to show that to him."

Well, just about that time, Mr. Sinatra was standing right at the edge of the stage. He looked down and he had seen me, I guess. He said, "Can I see that?"

"Yes sir, sure." I turned around to him.

He said, "Damn, uh, what are you doing after the show?"

"We're just down here at the Dunes."

"Eh," to the waiter, "bring a round backstage, will you?"

We went around backstage and he and Martin. And he said, "I like that. You know, my hobby is painting."

I said, "Really?"

He showed me a thing he had there in his dressing room that he had done.

I said, "Huh."

He said, "Yeah, it's not very good," but he said, "I'm having fun with it. That's what I do on the side." He said, "What do you want for that?"

I said, "What do you mean what do—" I said, "I'd like for you to have it, if you want it."

He said, "Hell yes I want it. Would you sign it to me? Would you put your name on it?"

I said, "Sure, if you want it." So I did, gave it to him.

We went back a couple of nights while we were there. We still had that spot right down front.

Well, about four or five years later, a friend of mine, I grew up here in Tulsa, he moved down to Palm Springs, California. And he became a buddy of Frank Sinatra's at their country club. And this guy was a real entrepreneurial guy, he was a big buddy of J. Howard Edmondson, the governor.

JE: Of Oklahoma, right?

JO: And he married a classmate of mine's sister. Anyway, he ended up in Palm Springs and he did PR work and got involved with celebrities. And they had this annual Sinatra fundraiser. Every year the Sinatra Foundation type thing, brings all these high rollers and big dollars and big fundraisers for charity. Frank did more things that people don't know about. He said, "If you tell anybody I did this, I'm not going to do it, okay?" That's the way he was, very good to people. Made Sammy Davis Jr., by the way.

But anyway, this guy knew my love and admiration for Sinatra. He said, "How would you like to do a portrait of him? We'll do it and we'll have a fundraiser, we'll have an auction. And we'll auction the thing off."

I said, "Wow." So I did. Unfortunately, it's one of the disappointments of my life because they didn't like it when it got out there. And I put this big two thousand dollar frame on it, shipped it out there, and Gene called me and said, "Jay, I hate to tell you this, but his agent and his wife, they don't like it. It's not vibrant enough."

I said, "Really? Well, okay."

He said, "I'm sending it back to you and then I'm sending some very nice little thank you gifts." Sinatra signed a bunch of stuff for me, a set of golf clubs, all kinds of stuff, and I got the painting back. Which is up in my studio. I used to have it hanging over at my son-in-law's restaurant over at Rancho Grande's on 11th. We had the Sinatra Corner. We left it over there, people just loved the thing.

But anyway, unfortunately, that was my big moment that I blew. And I could see, now that I look back at it, "Yeah, they're right. It wasn't vibrant enough for Sinatra." I guess I tried so hard I over-tried and I just didn't get that something, the right gesture, the right something. And I've said, "One of these I'm going to go back, it's one on my bucket list, I'm going to work that thing again sometime."

I get Sirius on the radio and his daughter Tina, they have their foundation, I said, "I'm going to get that website and I'm going to tell them I did this portrait of their father and I would like to show it to them." Some day I'm going to get around to doing that. They were just kids then, they wouldn't know about it.

And I followed him all over, in fact, he was in Norman, did a great concert there. He was in Tulsa right toward the end of his career.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JO: I helped to babysit and, you know, I took all my kids and everybody because they knew the old man just loved Sinatra. I followed him all from the time in 1945, at least half a dozen times, I guess, over the years.

That was one of my big disappointments. And this poor buddy of mine was so embarrassed.

I said, "Hey, you win some, you lose some."

JE: But you had so many, many victories. That would be probably the biggest defeat you had.

JO: Big time.

JE: And so, did that linger with you after a while or did you shrug it off?

JO: Well, sure, what are you going to do? I mean, you know, life goes on. You win some, you lose some. I've been exposed to some big things, some of them I succeeded at: the *Kick*; the *Game of the Century*; the *US Opens*.

JE: Right.

JO: They are a couple of portraits and things but I never pushed it.

JE: Never pushed, what do you mean?

JO: Trying to be a big-time success. I got involved in galleries in Santa Fe, New York, Chicago, Dallas. I saw that end of my field that just didn't appeal to me. It was too high pressure, crank it out, expose yourself to things that were against your principles.

I'll never forget, years ago, a gallery in Chicago wanted to put me on contract. I thought, "Eww boy, that's great." But to produce a number of paintings a year, I said, "I can't produce that number."

"Oh yes you can."

I said, "I'm left-handed. What happens if my left hand just drops off from overuse?"

"Oh no, that'll never—we've got other guys—"

I said, "I'm not a hack, number one, okay? You want me to be a hack and crank this stuff out, the same thing over and over." You know, that's the trick is to get something and then do variations off of it. I said, "That's not me. I don't work that way. And nobody owns me, by the way."

JE: You're more free-spirited then that.

JO: Yeah.

JE: Yeah.

JO: Well, I just don't like to be used, I guess.

JE: Right.

JO: For "success." I could tell you names of guys in my business that I went to school with, big names. They were very successful in their public and their works. Total failures in their private life, their family, and so forth. They had no life outside their work. They were a slave to what they did, and this addiction was just overwhelming them to the extent that they couldn't do anything else because they couldn't relax, let's say, and back off a little bit. They figured they would not be able to do it, which is a bunch of baloney.

I observed people like that, the Rockwells, the Sergeants, contemporaries that I know, and I said, "That's no way to live."

Chapter 20 – 5:00
Luckiest Guy in the World

John Erling: You referred to your gift earlier on that you were loaned a gift.

Jay O'Meilia: I'm the luckiest guy in the world. Why me? I have no earthly reason why I was picked, but I was loaned a gift. Just like people in my field, we're spoiled rotten with this gift. Why I was picked, why I have had this great life, how lucky can you be? When you see all the misery and stuff going on and I think, "How did he look down and go, 'You're going to do this'?" You know?

JE: Yeah.

JO: How about Sinatra? I remember he talking about that, he said, "Why was I as blessed with this voice and this ability?" And he was a hard working professional. What he did sounded casual. He worked that thing.

I saw him do things and I thought, "He is a pro. He took that gift and used it."

I took mine and used it to the best of my ability. But I also knew that there were other things in this world besides my work. I couldn't be a Charlie Banks Wilson. I hate to say that.

JE: Charles Banks Wilson. I interviewed him for this website. Let me just say that he did portraits in our capitol.

JO: Right.

JE: Of Robert Kerr.

JO: Oh yeah. Thorpe—

JE: And then he did Jim Thorpe. And then he did the four murals of Oklahoma.

JO: Right.

JE: In our state capitol.

JO: Right.

JE: So you say you couldn't be like him. What does that mean?

JO: Well, because everything that he did in his life was around him. His family, I won't go into his personal life, but it was a mess. Okay? He was well-known. He was a great promoter, and again, observing all or nothing at all in their life, in their work.

I was never that addictive, I'll put it that way, to the extent that I would sacrifice my wife, my children, my life, everything for my career. You know, that baloney. My career.

I saw what Sinatra went through with wives and children. He loved his children but—

JE: So it wasn't always about your gift. You lived a more balanced life.

JO: Balance.

JE: And—

JO: Normal, I was—

JE: ...normal life. The whole family wasn't all about our father who was an artist all the time.

JO: No.

JE: For some, it's always, "Oh, we've got to cater to him because he has this gift and he's popular and all that."

JO: Right. And—

JE: And you didn't live that way.

JO: No. Well, I wasn't raised that way. I mean, I had great parents, great philosophy of life and family. I was too damn normal, I guess you would say. You know, I've never put on an act. I never tried to be arty. And when I traveled, a lot of times you get into a group of different people. They would, "Now what do you do?"

"I'm an engineer."

"What do you do?"

"Well, I'm this . . ."

And they say, "Now, what do you do, Jay?"

I'd say, "Well, I'm in the oil business."

And they'd say, "Really?"

"Yeah, I'm from Oklahoma." That's not too interesting to them. But I could say that because I paint in oil.

JE: Right.

JO: But I would leave it at that. Because if I told them what I did, I know what my brother had to go through as a doctor out in public life. When they found out he was a doctor, "Oh, doctor, I've had this . . ." You know? And all doctors, that's why they stick together so well. Because they'd get out into a social environment and somebody would find out they're an MD or a DO or whatever. And they, "Oh, could you look at these . . ." and they go through this routine.

I'm a professional. Now, I don't call myself an artist, number one. I'm really strong about that. Too many people use and abuse that term, I think. I am a professional painter, sculptor, and print-maker, that's what I do. Fifty years after I'm gone, they'll go through that Rolodex file and they'll say, "Oh, O'Meilia, oh, nah. Put him back." I could care less about that. So did all the great people that I know of in my field. Because most of them it was a love, this happy addiction.

Mine's a little different, mine is a means to an end. I love my family, they come number one. I love a normal life. I didn't associate with many artists, I was more interested in my church, other people. I would have liked to have used a pseudonym, if you really want to know the truth. I'd like to have been Jorge Mallio. How about that, huh? Wouldn't that have been a kicker? You know, then I wouldn't have to put up with that, see?

Chapter 21 – 2:20
How to Be Remembered

John Erling: How would you like to be remembered?

Jay O'Meilia: As a professional painter, sculptor, print-maker, family man, hopefully, a decent father. Not the best husband in the world because of my field, but I was lucky enough to marry somebody that put up with me and gave me a lot of rope.

JE: You lost Jodie back in 2001.

JO: January 10th. Yeah.

JE: And that had to be awfully, awfully tough.

JO: We knew each other from the first grade. We were great friends. She was a hell of a lot smarter than me. She was a great mother. She could take care of the books, being a banker's daughter. She could write great letters. She could protect me against a lot of stuff. And she was just a great friend.

I knew that she really liked me in the fourth grade when we were walking down the hall at Marquette, and she came up to me, looked me right in the face, and said, "Jay O'Meilia?"

And I thought she didn't know who the hell I was.

She says, "You look like a monkey, you know that?"

And from then on I thought, "Hey, she likes me." We never dated until I came back from the navy the first time. But we never dated through high school. She dated somebody else, I dated somebody else. But I always had my eye on her. She didn't know it at the time.

I remember Bob LaFortune had a party and he had a friend of his in from college. He got Jodie as his date, as a blind date, for this friend of his. This other friend of mine, I took his sister. He said, "Would you take Jane?"

And I said, "Sure," because when he was at West Point, she would come out and we'd go to the Army/Navy game and I always had to escort his little sister. So I took Jane that night.

Well, this blind date didn't dance and Gene didn't dance. So I said, "Jodie, how about you and I? You want to dance?"

She said, "I'd love to." Because this guy she was with was boring as nothing. She told me later.

So anyway, we started dancing and we started dating after that, you know. Just out of the blue.

JE: Yeah.

JO: It was like fate.

JE: How many years were you married?

JO: Right at six months from fifty.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

JO: Yeah. Almost made fifty. Almost.

Chapter 22 – 8:00
Advice to Students

John Erling: Advice to students, art students, students in general, what would you say to them?

Jay O'Meilia: Be honest to themselves to the extent that you're going to have to work very hard. It's not easy, it's like digging ditches, but you've got to learn the fundamentals, which is drawing. Drawing is the basis of my field. Without that you're in deep doo-doo, because drawing, drawing, drawing, and then you learn the basics of painting. You learn that and oil. Oil is your Latin language of my field, because you learn value, you learn color, you learn style, you learn all of this that you can move around. And if you goof it up you can always wipe it back off and start over again. And once you learn in oil, you can work in any medium. Because you've learned the basic principles of color, design.

Just stay away from watercolors, stay away from acrylics, stay away from everything until you learn the principles in oil. The Latin language.

You say, "Well, where did you learn about acrylic?"

I said, "I knew about it all the time."

"Where did you learn about watercolor?"

"Knew about it all the time." Because it's all value, color, and design. Learning the technique is no big deal because you know the basic principles. You're not floundering on what color, what value, and these sort of things. Because you already have that ingrained in you. Then the little variation on a theme, and on sculptures is drawing. And most humbling of all mediums because it's 360 degrees. And you move that thing three quarters of an inch sometimes and it's a different ballgame. It just rips you because you find out just how little you know, a lot of times, and how you think you know it all. Forget it.

JE: Do you think it's possible for somebody who would like to draw, they're not very good at it, but they would like to do it and maybe even paint, that if they took lessons, can any of this be taught?

JO: Yes.

JE: And somebody could do more than they expected, but they may never be—

JO: Yes.

JE: ...outstanding, but it can be taught?

JO: Yes. Because everybody of average intelligence has a talent. It's usually buried because of being intimidated, "I can't do that." That's the dirtiest word in the English language is can't. I was never smart enough to know what that meant. Because I never put a barrier up. If I wanted to do something, I was going to figure out how to do it. I'd get kicked in the face a lot, but I learned how to do it.

And other people, not having the gift I was loaned, they could do it because so many people that I've taught, I mean, I had doctors, engineers, lawyers, geologists that were in my classes that I taught, what I called my professional classes. They all had that desire but they never tried to do it. And then they found out that I was having classes. And they said, "Gee, I've always wanted to be able to do that."

Just like I always wanted to be able to play the harmonica. Someday when I get old, I'm going to learn how to play the harmonica.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JO: I love the harmonica. And it's an issue you just carry around with you. But other people come to me all the time and say, "I'd love to be able to do what you can do."

And I said, "Well, you can, but you have to get instructed properly, that's the key ingredient." There ain't too many people out there that are teaching them the basics.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JO: That gives them confidence. It's not an easy field to learn. I know that and I had a head start.

JE: I noticed this morning on television that former President George Bush was on *The Tonight Show* with Jay Leno. Jay asked him what he was doing.

He said, "Well, I've taken up painting." And he said, "I have something here for you." And he handed him a portrait of Jay Leno.

JO: No kidding?

JE: What I could see quickly, it looked pretty good.

JO: Uh-huh (affirmative).

JE: And the President said, "And it's changed my life."

JO: Yeah.

JE: I was so taken with that. Here's a man who has been President, governor, all that kind of thing.

JO: Uh-huh (affirmative).

JE: And he's choosing not to really live in that world.

JO: Right.

JE: But painting changed his life.

JO: It has changed a lot of lives of people. As I said, Sinatra turned into a pretty damn good painter. I know two or three actors, and I'm trying to think of one. *On Golden Pond*.

JE: Fonda.

JO: Fonda. Hell of a painter. In his hotel rooms, when he was doing stage shows, he would do paintings of the room he was in. Still lives of his rooms. Beautiful, professional as all get out. And many people in the "celebrity" or political or whatever field, paint or sculpt.

George Montgomery was an actor. He took up sculpture. I saw his one-man show in LA and it was unbelievable.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

JO: How good that guy was. He was a pro, doing western sculpture. I have two pieces of his furniture in my home. When he first started doing a hobby it was woodworking.

And a friend of mine that I grew up with, was married to Louise O'Brien, the singer. They were in California, and they became close to George somehow, somewhere. And Luke bought a couple pieces of his furniture that he did.

I've got a coffee table in my living room, it's the damnedest looking thing you ever saw. And then a TV cabinet and a dresser, all made by George Montgomery. I wish they were signed.

But he bought those things and when he moved to New York, I bought them from him. He didn't even hardly charge me anything for them. He didn't want to take them with him, he didn't have any room to carry much of furniture.

So I got these great pieces. But Montgomery became a really pro sculptor. Throughout history, Winston Churchill took up painting and was scared to death of a blank canvas. And his neighbor came over and he was sitting out there and somebody told him to get an easel and paints and so forth. And he's sitting on his patio and he was going to do a landscape. But here's this brilliant mind, a brilliant adventurer and everything. But that blank canvas just scared the hell out of him.

His neighbor came over, who was a professional painter, landscape painter, and asked Winston, "What's the—"

He said, "Well, I just don't—" he had no idea how to start.

This guy sat down and he set up his paints and so forth, and he went, "Ba-da-da-da-da."

Churchill said, "Really? That's the way you do it?"

He said, "Yeah. You look at that color and you put your tip in. You start thin and you work thick."

And he became a pretty good painter.

A friend of mine here in town, owned about four Winston Churchill originals.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

JO: You hear people all the time, they say, "God, I wish I could do what you do." You can, but you've got to get some instruction.

JE: Here you are, eighty-five and you're still painting, aren't you? And sculpting?

JO: Yep. Yep.

JE: Well, I want to thank you for our time together here. It's been extremely interesting.

JO: Well, I hope I haven't bored you too much. Just—

JE: You have not. You're great at details and telling us stories, and so this story will live on forever and ever and ever. Your voice.

JO: You know, when you've done something, and the time and hard work, your mind retains an awful lot of that. And unfortunately, I got a damned near photographic mind, which people say, "You're too damn old to remember all that stuff."

I said, "Really? You go through what I've been through, you don't forget stuff very much. Because you had to work awfully damn hard to get it." And so I said, "I'm like an elephant, it takes me a long time to get something." I was always a plodder. But I said, "When I got something, you ain't going to take it away from me, that's for damn sure."

JE: Well, we're glad you remembered it. Thank you very much, Jay.

JO: You bet.

Chapter 23 – 0:33
Conclusion

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