

## William J. Ross

A leader in Oklahoma state's law  
and business community.

### Chapter 1 – 1:17

#### Introduction

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**Announcer:** The family of William J. “Bill” Ross can be traced to the Civil War, the Oklahoma Land Run, World War I and World War II. As a boy, Bill Ross sold magazine subscriptions and held various other jobs in downtown Oklahoma City. In fact, his entire career was built in a three-block area of downtown Oklahoma City. He remembers the Dust Bowl days and the Great Depression. He reminisces about movies, restaurants, radio and TV shows from the 1940s and 1950s. After graduating from The University of Oklahoma and The University of Oklahoma Law School, he eventually became a partner in the law firm of Rainey Ross Rice & Binns. The law firm represented the Oklahoma Publishing Company. Soon, Bill served as an attorney to E.K. Gaylord, Senior, publisher of *The Daily Oklahoman*. Mr. Ross describes his relationship with Mr. Gaylord and his daughter Edith Kinney Gaylord and provides his insights into their life as well. Bill Ross received the OU Regents Alumni Award in 2000 for his extensive involvement with The University of Oklahoma. The recollections of Bill Ross help preserve the legacy of Oklahoma—made possible by the generous support of friends and sponsors of [VoicesofOklahoma.com](http://VoicesofOklahoma.com). Listen now to William J. “Bill” Ross on [VoicesofOklahoma.com](http://VoicesofOklahoma.com).

### Chapter 2 – 7:20

#### Oklahoma Land Run

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**John Erling:** My name is John Erling. Today's date is January 20th, 2012. Bill, if you would state your full name and date of birth and present age please.

**Bill Ross:** My name is William Jarboe Ross. I was born on May 9, 1930. My age is 81.

**JE:** Where are we recording this interview?

**BR:** We are in the offices of our two foundations, the Inasmuch Foundation and the Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation.

**JE:** Let's go back and start by talking about your grandfather.

**BR:** All right.

**JE:** What was your grandfather's name?

**BR:** My grandfather Ross was named George Ross. He had no middle name. He was an orphan. He was raised by an order of nuns in Saint Louis, Missouri. I think he was born in about 1858. He had a very good education up through the seventh or eighth grade. He was bilingual. He left school when he was about 14 years old. It's my understanding that he went to live with a family in the Saint Louis area. I don't think that worked out very well, so I think he took off six months or a year after he went to live with them. I don't know anything about the interim, except I know that he married my grandmother in Gainesville, Texas. Her name was Justina Westerman. She was from Bon Bon, Germany. She had some brothers that were over here in the U.S. I think they left Germany because the Prince was demanding that all of the boys serve in the army, which was not a good thing at all. Some of the brothers came over and then my grandmother came over. How she got to Gainesville I am not sure. There were several Westermans here in Oklahoma, even when I was a boy. She had one brother here, so I assume that's how she got to Gainesville and how they met.

**JE:** Do you know when they met or got married?

**BR:** They were married in 1886. I have their marriage license in an old, German Catholic missal.

**JE:** So how and why did they come to Oklahoma?

**BR:** My grandfather had a bakery in Gainesville. The lands were opening up here in Oklahoma. He thought that was a good opportunity, so he made the Land Run into Indian Territory on April 22, 1889. I think it's always been interesting that he made the Land Run on the Santa Fe Railroad. The word is that in earlier years a horse stepped on his foot or something. He didn't like horses at all, so he was much happier making the Land Run on the Santa Fe Railroad.

**JE:** We might point out of course that horses and horse- drawn wagons and buggies at Noon on that day, all took off at the sound of a gun.

**BR:** Yes, they all took off, as did the train.

**JE:** Did the train have to go a certain speed?

**BR:** I think 12 mph was the fastest the train could go. They tried to calibrate it to the speed of a horse so it wouldn't have an advantage and beat everyone up here. It was at a point north of Purcell right there on the South Canadian River at Noon on April 22, 1889. The guns went off and the train and the horses and the carriages and wagons and the people on foot all took off running.

**JE:** They say it was just a beautiful sunny blue-sky day.

**BR:** That's what I've heard too. So the train came on up to the station in OKC, which was a little bit south of where the present Santa Fe station is located. It sounds too good to be true, but I understand that he walked across the street and staked out a lot on the corner of California, which is now E.K. Gaylord.

**JE:** How big of a lot would that have been?

**BR:** It was either 20 or 25 feet.

**JE:** So he just walked out and saw a lot that had not been claimed yet?

**BR:** That was the word I got. I don't know what all was involved in that, but he ended up with it. There were no questions asked on my part. (Chuckle) So he ended up with the lot and he started to construct his bakery there. My grandmother stayed down in Gainesville, Texas until the building was completed in the middle of May in 1889. I guess they were married in 1885, because my Uncle George was born in late 1886 and my dad was born on June 21st, 1888. So my dad was about 11 months old when my grandmother brought him and my Uncle George to OKC on the train. They moved into the back of the bakery at first, then later that summer they moved into a hotel or something. Eventually they had a lot down on Washington Street, which is now Second Street. They sold the lot where they had built their house to OG&E in the 1920s. I'd like to tell you a little bit more about my grandfather if you would be interested in hearing it.

**JE:** Yes!

**BR:** After they made the Run and got settled in and everything, he was on the second City Council here in Oklahoma City. He was always involved in the affairs of the city and very interested in it apparently. He was on the city council and he spoke English and he spoke French from his early days. He also spoke German, because my grandmother taught him that. My grandmother would not allow German to be uttered in her house once they moved to the United States. This was the Land of Promise and she was not going to have that. But apparently, she did teach him German when she first got over here. He translated the city charter to be voted on into the other two languages. There was a quite extensive German population here at that time and I think some French also. I've got the English copy he had, but I don't have either of the other two.

**JE:** So he was very civically involved?

**BR:** Yes, he was. He was until he died. I never knew him well. He died when I was five. I have memories of taking walks with him and going to the grocery store with him and things like that.

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**Chapter 3 – 7:00****World War I**

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**John Erling:** Let's talk about your father. What was his full name?

**Bill Ross:** His name was Walter John Ross. As I said, he was born in Gainesville, Texas. He, too was an '89er. (Chuckle) Although he was only 11 months old, I think they would count anybody that got here as an '89er that got here before December 31st, 1889. You didn't actually have to make the Land Run. So he was eligible to be a charter member of The '89ers Association, although he was only 11 months old.

**JE:** So he grew up here and went to school here in Oklahoma City?

**BR:** Yes. He went to Washington School, which was on Washington Street. That was about as far south as Oklahoma City went then down toward the river. Eventually, there were a total of eight children, seven boys and one girl that my grandparents had. The one girl died I think of typhoid fever. I had an Uncle Frederick who of some other childhood disease. At that time, the mortality rate was high. Then I had another uncle who drowned in a flood when he was three or four years old in the South Canadian River. That left my grandparents with five boys. It was interesting to hear some of their stories. In the summer they did a lot of swimming down in the North Canadian River near Wheeler Park. My oldest uncle, Uncle George worked for the Fire Department of Oklahoma City. He ended up being the Fire Marshal years later, which is like being the assistant chief.

**JE:** Let's go back to your father's service in the military.

**BR:** Okay.

**JE:** World War I breaks out in 1914. What year did your father go to war?

**BR:** 1917.

**JE:** That was the first year that the United States entered the war.

**BR:** I think in April 1917 he went overseas to war. He fought in the trenches. As a boy he had worked for the Frisco Railroad and he had learned telegraphy. It was nice, but it turned out to be bad news because that got him into the trenches laying the line about the trenches. The Germans were just a few hundred yards away and they were crawling along laying lines.

**JE:** Was he ever injured?

**BR:** No. A number of his friends were killed. Some were killed in a bizarre manner. As we know today, you can have trauma from battle situations, as the boys coming back from Afghanistan have that we are learning about. They didn't know much about that when my dad was in the service.

**JE:** Did he ever tell you stories about the war?

**BR:** No, really he didn't. He told me about some incidents. He said he got the flu while he was over there. He said it was one of the luckiest things that had ever happened to him because he got to leave the trenches and go into Paris for a while.

**JE:** Did he keep a diary or anything?

**BR:** No, but he sent letters to my grandmother. I've got a few of those. They are pretty graphic, as much as they could be under censorship. It was really a very hard experience. It was really about as grim as you can imagine from the letters I've read.

**JE:** Was he there until the end of the war in 1919?

**BR:** Yes, then he came back. A funny incident occurred when he came back. Apparently my grandmother's family the Westermans had some family in New York City. So when the boat came back, he disembarked and looked up his cousins in New York City and stayed with them for a few days. They were all good Catholics. He went to Sunday Mass the first Sunday he was there. He went to this church and he went to confession—the whole thing. He went back and said he felt good about life because he had that experience the first Sunday he was there. So he was visiting with his cousin years later, the boy that he had stayed with there in New York. They were talking about the church that he went to. His cousin said, "Walter, where was this church again?" He explained to him where it was and his cousin said, "You went to an Episcopal Church. That wasn't the Roman Catholic Church!" (Laughter)

**JE:** You said he had the flu? The influenza epidemic was in 1918, 1919 and 1920?

**BR:** Yes, it was very bad. He almost died. But he got back to Oklahoma City before he had that. He had a scar. It sounds primitive, but they had to operate on his back to get fluid off of his lungs. He had a huge indentation on his back his whole life that remained. It was a fierce thing.

**JE:** We might point out that the flu killed between 20 and 40 million people in that time period.

**BR:** It was just awful.

**JE:** Isn't that amazing that he made it through that? What a strong person he was to make the Land Run and survive World War I and survive the flu epidemic.

**BR:** He was.

**JE:** You come from strong stock. (Laughter)

**BR:** Well, it was truly amazing. When he was young, before the war, I don't know how old he was, but he went to work for a music company. I think he owned a small interest in it. My dad didn't have an accounting degree, but he was excellent at numbers. I think he kept the books for that music company for a number of years. He came back and worked for them after the war until the business went under in about 1930. I can vaguely remember visiting him there. It was down on main street where John A. Brown was located years later. The Depression hit and the company went under, so my dad worked as the assistant county

treasurer for a number of years. Then his health just failed. I think we can recognize now that it was just a nervous breakdown.

**JE:** Was it depression maybe?

**BR:** Yes, it was depression—the whole thing. His eyes— couldn't keep his eyelids open.

Everything hit at once. He was that way the rest of his life. He was an extremely strong person. I know my mother sometimes would pack a lunch for him. He would swim every day at the YMCA at Noon for his whole lunch period.

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

**BR:** He was probably the most gentle person I ever knew. I can't imagine anybody being kinder or more gentle. After my grandfather Ross passed away, he always took great care of everybody. He just was very kind. I never heard him say a bad thing about anybody. I never heard him get mad. He was just a very gentle person. Maybe it would have been better for him to have been a little meaner. (Laughter)

**JE:** It sounds like he was a tough guy, even though his personality was gentle, physically he was very strong.

**BR:** He was.

## Chapter 4 – 4:18

### Civil War

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**John Erling:** Later he meets your mother, who became his wife?

**Bill Ross:** Yes, they were married in 1928.

**JE:** Her name was?

**BR:** Bertha Jarboe. She was a very strong person. She was very pretty. She was the youngest of three girls. My grandmother was an invalid. My mother took care of her of course. I had two aunts. My Aunt Mary Esther Jarboe was a teacher. They all lived together in a house that my grandfather Jarboe built when he came down here in 1912. Due to the fact that my grandmother was ill, when my father and mother got married, they moved in with her to take care of her. She was quite a gal too. She was pretty well to do from my grandfather. My grandfather Jarboe's father, my great grandfather had been in the Civil War. He lived in Kentucky. As a boy, my great-grandfather, when he was about 15 went into the Civil War when it broke out. He was shot and lost a lung. In 1872, when my grandfather was really young, they left Kentucky and came out to Kansas with my grandfather and two of his other sons. They lived in Parsons, Kansas, but they had a ranch in Nowata County here.

**JE:** That's how they gained their wealth?

**BR:** Yes. They came down here in 1912. His brothers stayed running the ranch in Nowata when my grandfather came down and opened a commission house here in Oklahoma City when the Stockyards opened. I think it was about 1910.

**JE:** What's a commission house?

**BR:** That's a place where they sold the cattle. They leased most of their land in Nowata County and owned just a little bit of it. Most of it was leased from the Cherokee. My grandmother and grandfather and my mother of course and her two sisters were all moved down here. In 1912, my mother would have been 13. He built a house where I lived as a boy.

**JE:** Where was it?

**BR:** It was 1626 NW 16th Street. It actually faced a side street, but the side street wasn't there when he built the house. Today, it's a historic spot. People who developed the Plaza District rejuvenated it. They bought the old house and it's the main office for the Plaza District.

**JE:** What kind of a personality did your mother have? Was she very strong willed?

**BR:** Yes, she was. She was very strong. As I mentioned, my grandmother was ill so she had to take care of her and run the house. She always had some help. I mean she had maids and things. I remember she always made sure that I got my homework done and that I was on the straight and narrow. She was the disciplinarian. My father was just a kindly person. It was a situation that worked very well for both of them. They seemed to be very happy together.

**JE:** Did you have brothers and sisters?

**BR:** No.

**JE:** So they doted on their only child.

**BR:** Well, I was the only grandchild as a matter of fact. Neither of my mother's sisters had any children either. Needless to say, my grandmother and I thought a lot of each other.

**JE:** When you lived there in that house there was no air conditioning obviously.

**BR:** No.

**JE:** Did you have electricity and indoor plumbing?

**BR:** Yes. I had electricity and indoor plumbing. I can remember it was just hot as the dickens in the summertime. The windows would be open and you could hear the trains whistling. This was during the 1930s when we had some record heat.

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**Chapter 5 – 2:00****Dust Bowl**

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**Bill Ross:** I can remember when the dust storms came—The Dust Bowl days with these rolling clouds of dust. I can remember one day my dad and I were out in the backyard. He got a wet towel and he just swung it around the air and the towel was just filthy, so we went back in the house.

**John Erling:** You clearly remember all of that?

**BR:** Yes, I remember it very well.

**JE:** Lots of people of course were without work?

**BR:** Yes, people would come to the door and need things. They were never be turned away by my mother or my grandmother. People were just in need. They would be in an old World War I truck and their families would be with them. They didn't have a home or anything. My mother would always figure out something for them to do. They wouldn't just say, "Here's some food." They would give the family some food and have them come back. They would have the father of the family do a little work around the place and then they would give him a dollar or 50 cents or something.

**JE:** Because at the time your father's income was from the music store?

**BR:** No, by this time he was working at the county treasurer's office as the assistant county treasurer. The music store went under about 1934.

**JE:** Okay. So he had a good steady job then?

**BR:** Oh yes. During the Depression we were never pressed for anything. I think his health completely failed about 1942. But all during the 1930s I can remember as a child going to school that a lot of my classmates' fathers did not have work. Certainly the school that I went to wasn't on poverty row, but still, nobody had a great deal. It was just very limited. I can remember we were very comfortable.

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**Chapter 6 – 3:00****Bill the Salesman**

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**John Erling:** Where we you born?

**Bill Ross:** I was born at Saint Anthony's. It's still there today. Our children were also born there. It started out about 1895 I would guess and it's been there ever since caring for people.

**JE:** What was the name of the first school you attended?

**BR:** Rosary School here in Oklahoma City over on 18th Street. It's also still there. The Benedictine nuns ran that. They had an old German pastor who came over with a very bunch of very well-educated French and Belgian and German young priests.

**JE:** How many years did you go to that school?

**BR:** I went there nine years, the first through the ninth grade. At that time high school started in the 10th grade. Then I went to Classen High School.

**JE:** As a young boy in the 1930s, did you work?

**BR:** Yes.

**JE:** What did you do?

**BR:** By the time I was 10 years old, I had the largest *Saturday Post* route in Oklahoma City. I had the third-largest *Liberty Post* and *Ladies Home Journal* route in OKC. This turned out to be very lucrative. *The Saturday Post* sold for five cents. I got 2.5 cents for every one I sold. I made my mother take me down to the courthouse. I would visit my father's office and I'd make the rounds there and sell them. Then I would go through the courthouse. Then I would go visit my Uncle George who had an office over at City Hall. It was pretty easy to do that. When I was 13, this was in the middle of the war. It was very easy to get jobs then, because all of the boys who were over 17 were overseas in the service. So at 13, I went to work in a 5 and 10-cent store by my house. That was for a quarter an hour. Then I found out that Petty Hardware needed someone to wash the windows and they paid 35 cents an hour, so I went to work there. Then on Saturdays I would work at Crowder's Grocery store there in the same area. I think I got 35 cents an hour there too.

**JE:** How about newspapers?

**BR:** I never sold newspapers, just magazines.

**JE:** You would have been 9 years old in 1939 when Hitler invaded Poland?

**BR:** Yes. I remember it very well. I was at Saint Anthony's Hospital. I had strep throat on September 1st, 1939. My father stayed with me. He didn't like the idea of me staying alone in the hospital too much. He had a newspaper and he said, "Hitler just invaded Poland and this is bad news."

**Chapter 7 – 3:22****Pearl Harbor**

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**John Erling:**

**Bill Ross:** To this day I remember we had been to church on December 7, 1941—the 11:30 mass.

We came home and it was bleak. My best friend who lived several doors down had the flu or something, so I couldn't be with him. I was working on my stamp collection. My dad came in and he had been listening to the radio. He said, "The Japanese just bombed Pearl Harbor." About an hour later, *The Daily Oklahoman* came out with an extra edition. They were selling them on the street by our house yelling, "Extra! Extra!" I went out and took a nickel and bought a paper. I remember that night we were all huddled around the radio and there were rumors that a submarine had come into the harbor in either San Diego or San Francisco... but it was time for me to go to bed. I was sure they were going to invade us. The lights on the ceiling that night I just knew were the Japanese coming to get me. (Laughter)

**JE:** Here you were 11 years old.

**BR:** Yes, and I was scared of the Japanese.

**JE:** In the days following that, do you remember men and young boys from the neighborhood going to war?

**BR:** Oh sure, the older brothers of my classmates at Rosary—they were all shipped off. That's how come it was so easy for me to get work. It was late 1943 or 1944 and I had a bicycle. Everything was scarce. If you didn't already have one you couldn't get one because they weren't making them. I was 13 years old I guess. I got a job in downtown OKC with a stationery & office supply store called H. Dorsey Douglas, so I made deliveries all over downtown on my bicycle.

**JE:** This was when there weren't that many bikes around.

**BR:** There weren't—and if you didn't have one you were up the creek.

**JE:** How did you get one?

**BR:** I got mine before the war when I was 10 or 11 or something. It was hard getting tires for it. When I heard that tires were getting scarce, I took my money from selling the *Saturday Post* and I bought two or three tires and stashed them away so I would have them when I needed them. I remember one story. The day that Roosevelt died, a tornado hit and it knocked out the electricity. I was making a delivery for H. Dorsey Douglas over at the First National Building. At that time you didn't have automatic buttons that you pushed, but a man that ran the elevator. So we were on our way up to make the delivery. There was a woman on the elevator with us, and a man that had a terrible back situation. He was all bent over so he couldn't serve in the war. He was 4F I am sure. The electricity went out on the elevator. He

asked me if I could climb up and get the elevator going, which fortunately I could. He asked if I would go up to the 29th floor or wherever it was to advise the people in the office that the elevator had stopped. So I went up the stairs and advised them. They told me to go back down and tell them there was nothing they could do about it because the electricity was out. All of my life, ever since I was 13 and went to work for H. Dorsey Douglas, I've worked within three blocks of where we are at this very moment at 200 Park Avenue.

## Chapter 8 – 6:26

### Movies – Cafes – Media

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**John Erling:** Where did you go to high school?

**Bill Ross:** I went to the old Classen High School. While I was there I continued to work downtown. By then I went to work for Liberty National Bank. They needed an office boy to make deliveries for them and do whatever was necessary year-round. When I applied for the job they said they could really use me in the winter. They asked me if I could work through the winter as well and still go to school. I said, "Yes, I think I can work that out." I worked for them from 1945 all the way through law school actually.

**JE:** You worked from an early age. Was this something that your parents told you that you had to do, or was it innate within you that you wanted and liked to work?

**BR:** As I look back now it turned out that I liked it, but I really felt like I needed to work. After my dad got sick, he lost his job at the county treasurer's office. Nothing too bad would have happened to us had I not worked because my grandmother was still in the picture. But I was aware that I should be doing something to help out the situation. So I worked all the way through junior high school and high school. I never felt like I missed out on anything. When I was over at the bank I made \$80 a month. Well, talk about tall cotton.

**JE:** That was what year?

**BR:** 1945, 1946, 1947 and then I graduated in 1948. In Oklahoma City, there were some people that were well to do, but you have to remember this is 60 years after all of these people made the Land Run that didn't have anything. I didn't feel like we were terribly bad off. I certainly didn't feel like we were well off.

**JE:** But you never felt like you were lacking anything?

**BR:** No.

**JE:** Tell us in that period when you were in high school—do you remember movies you watched or theaters that you went to?

**BR:** Our house was just a block from The Plaza Theater. I remember the first movie I ever saw was at The Plaza. I was about five or six years old. It was a Shirley Temple movie. She was about the cutest thing I had ever seen. 16th Street was very busy and my folks wouldn't let me cross the street to go down to the movies unless one of them could be with me. They were afraid I might be hit by a car or something. I guess the first movie I ever saw was really interesting. I was about 13 years old. The movie was *The Outlaw* and Jane Russell was in it. There was kind of an awakening in that movie. I went from Shirley Temple to Jane Russell (Chuckle) that's kind of a big leap there. I was aware that there was a difference by the time I saw Jane Russell. (Laughter) Movies were the big thing. In high school, if you had a date you would go to the movie and that would cost a quarter. After the movie, you would go out to get a hamburger at Chicken in the Rough and that would be another quarter. A date never cost more than a dollar.

**JE:** It sounds like from all of the work you did you always had expendable income?

**BR:** Oh yes. That was one of the joys of working was payday.

**JE:** What other businesses or restaurants do you remember in Oklahoma City during that time?

**BR:** Anna Maude's. It was right here in what is now The Renaissance Building. It was down in the basement. It was a world-class cafeteria. It really set a standard that lasted for years. Oklahoma City had the best cafeterias in the country, but none of them were as good as Anna Maude's. It was just excellent. We had Bishop's Restaurant, which was over on Broadway. I've already mentioned Chicken in the Rough that we would hit after the movies. We would hit Bishop's too after a party downtown. Dolores was just a superb restaurant down on 23rd Street. It was the home of the Curley-Q potato. Now if you get the Curley-Q potato anywhere in the world, the first was invented at Dolores down here in Oklahoma City. It was just an excellent restaurant. The main reason all of these places were so good was that the owners were sitting up front at the cash register watching what was going on and asking how the service was. They made sure that it was good.

**JE:** Do you remember any department stores or clothing stores?

**BR:** There was Rothschilds at the corner of Harvey and Main Street—that would be the iconic one. There was John A. Brown, which was the department store. You could get anything you wanted there. We had the central area downtown at that time and all of these places that I've mentioned were located there, as were the Criterion Theater and the State Theater. All of the really good old theaters were located right downtown.

**JE:** What about radio stations?

**BR:** We had WKY, which I think was one of the first radio stations west of the Mississippi. Mr. E.K. Gaylord started it back in the early 1920s. We had KOMA, which they used to say that they had a 15,000MW unit or something. You could hear them all over Oklahoma and

Texas. They were very proud of that. There was KOCY. I had a good friend whose father always liked to be on the cutting edge, so he had a television set at his house before we even had a television station. He set it up a week or 10 days ahead of time. I remember my friend and I and his parents watched E.K. Gaylord dedicate WKY-TV.

**JE:** So that was your first television experience seeing E.K. dedicate that station?

**BR:** Yes.

**JE:** Little did you know that you would later work for him.

## Chapter 9 – 6:03

### Classen – OU

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**John Erling:** Classen High School, that was a good experience for you?

**Bill Ross:** Yes. I worked in the afternoons, but I was still able to keep my grades up. My grandmother told me not to smoke so I wouldn't stunt my growth. That's all we worried about then, we didn't worry about lung cancer. As long as I didn't smoke and kept my grades up, when I was 16 she would give me a car. So I kept my grades up and I made all of the societies that you could make if you did have good grades. I didn't smoke until I was 15. By that time I was 6'1" or something. She said, "You can go ahead and smoke now if you want to." (Laughter) I kept my grades up and I got my car.

**JE:** What kind of a car did you get?

**BR:** A Plymouth. That was a story in itself. She had always promised it to me when I turned 16. Right after the war you couldn't get a car or a bicycle—nothing. There was just a terrible scarcity of everything. My birthday was May 9, 1946. So my grandmother called her brother-in-law, my grandfather's brother and said, "I've got to get a car for Billy. I promised it to him if he made his grades and he did." He said, "We can't do that. There's no way you can get a car right now they are too scarce." He said, "I've got a Dodge that I drive." She said, "What year is it?" He said, "It's a 1946." I don't know how he did it, but he got me a Plymouth and brought it down.

**JE:** That had to be a day you remember.

**BR:** That had to be the happiest day of my life other than the day I got married.

**JE:** You were probably a big hero in the neighborhood?

**BR:** Oh yeah. My popularity jumped several degrees immediately.

**JE:** Do you remember some of the names of your classmates from Classen?

**BR:** One of them was David Hall, who was governor. Another one was Pete Darcy who was

with me from the first grade at Rosary through high school. He was 6'11" and he became a very famous basketball player for several NBA teams but he ended up with the Harlem Globetrotters. Another classmate who is a dear friend is Dick Workman. I've had a lot of dear friends, but many of them have passed on through the years, but we had a good group.

**JE:** So you graduate from high school in 1948 and then what happens?

**BR:** I went off to college to get my degree and my grandmother I don't know why, here I was a city boy who rode his bike and sold *Saturday Post*, but she thought I ought to be a rancher. I was like my grandfather Ross. I was afraid that a horse would step on me. So I went to Stillwater for a year.

**JE:** It was Oklahoma A&M then?

**BR:** Yes. I was there for a year. Then that summer my dear old grandmother passed away. So I switched and went to OU that September after she died that June. I loved college. It was just great. A lot of my fraternity friends are still friends to this day.

**JE:** What fraternity were you in?

**BR:** Beta Theta Pi.

**JE:** What was your degree in?

**BR:** My degree was in Finance with a double minor in Economics and Law, which at that time counted as a minor. Your freshman year in law school would count as your senior year in business school, so it only took me six years to get my two degrees. You can't do that anymore. I worked at Liberty National all of those years.

**JE:** Were you a teller by that time?

**BR:** I did everything. I could be a teller or get in the car and take some checks up to the Federal Reserve or whatever needed to be done.

**JE:** Who was the President of OU at that time?

**BR:** George Cross. He was a wonderful man. He was very talented. As I look back at all of the presidents down there—of course Boren is in a class by himself in my opinion—but George Cross was an excellent president of OU. The university wasn't beautiful back in those days. I mean so much has been done and so much has been built, but we thought it was beautiful then. It was just great fun. I made marvelous life-long friends. I got a fine education. The law school was just outstanding. The professors at the law school were some of the original ones that came when the law school started. They were all from ivy-league schools and the University of Michigan and Northwestern. It was just an excellent school and an excellent experience.

**JE:** A big name back then was their football coach...

**BR:** Oh yes! Bud Wilkinson. I guess he came in 1946 and by the time I got down there he really had things really moving along.

**JE:** So you went to some of those games I would imagine?

**BR:** Oh yes. We talk about that often. They were so pleasant. It might be 95 degrees, but we would always wear a wooly sport coat and a tie. We would usually have a date. We would sit in our own section. I just loved it. The game would be at 1:30pm or 2pm on Saturdays. They weren't at 7:30 at night or at 11 o'clock in the morning.

**JE:** It was like it should be.

**BR:** Right. It was like it should be. You don't realize until you lose something how neat it is. That was so good at the time we didn't realize it. That's just the way life was then. Then I got my business degree in 1952 and I got my law degree in 1954. I took the bar that summer. I was still working at Liberty National Bank.

## Chapter 10 – 5:03

### Law Firm

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**Bill Ross:** Then I went to work over at the City Attorney's office. As I told you, I've never been farther than three blocks from where we are sitting. It was right across the street from City Hall. A.L. Jeffries was the City Attorney. He was a marvelous old man.

**John Erling:** Did you like that job?

**BR:** It was just great. When you came to work for him, he said, "Now it's going to kill me when you do it, but don't stay here until you are 40 years old. Get out quicker if you can." While I was there, there were seven of us. I think they have 35 or something now. When one of us would leave, it would just break his heart. But when the next one would come and he would just tell them the same thing. He would tell them "Go on with a firm or go on with your life because this is not where you need to be."

**JE:** So then it was good advice?

**BR:** It was great advice. He loved to get together with his boys. We had a poker club that he loved too. It was called The Little Daisies. That club existed as long as he lived and even longer. He died when I was still over at the City Attorney's office. I went to work there in 1956 and he passed away in the fall of 1959, when I was getting ready to go with a law firm, which at that time was Rainey, Flynn, Green and Anderson. That was an excellent firm. It was probably the premier firm, or at least I thought it was.

**JE:** How did you get your job there? Did you have a connection there?

**BR:** I vaguely knew Mr. Flynn, but one of my fraternity brothers was there and he wanted me to come over. He wanted me to come over and meet everybody. They made me an offer

and I was tickled at death to get it. Of course, my friend was there too. He went on later and formed probably the premier firm in Dallas. His name was Dick Haynes.

**JE:** (Laughter) We should just say that Dick Haynes went on to become a very famous trial lawyer and tried some very famous cases.

**BR:** Yes, and he had that firm down there that was just without peer.

**JE:** I'm going to bring you to when you join the firm. Who are some of the clients that you had?

**BR:** We were Oklahoma state solicitors for the Santa Fe Railroad. We were general counsel for OG&E and OPUBCO and the Missouri, Kansas, Texas Railroad. We had a bunch of large clients and then we represented individual clients as well. Streeter Flynn and Judge Rainey had been very prominent in Oklahoma City. In fact, Streeter Flynn's father at the turn of the century with another man formed the Oklahoma Publishing Company for Mr. Gaylord and they owned OG&E. It was bad news. It wasn't worth anything at the time they owned it. I will never forget this was back in 1907 or 1908, and every New Year's Day they would flip a coin and whoever lost had to be the President of OG&E for that next year. So all of these things were just built by the time Streeter Flynn came along and Judge Rainey who had half of the clients in town. In fact, Mr. Vost from First National Bank told me one time, not in numbers, but in accumulated wealth, that we had about half of the total value of the trust department in our clients.

**JE:** The name of the firm again was?

**BR:** Rainey, Flynn, Lynn and Anderson.

**JE:** Somewhere in here you met your future bride at the same time that you were getting settled in to a law firm?

**BR:** I did. I went over there on February 1, 1960. I met her on a double date. She had a date with one of my best friends. I didn't know her before, although our parents knew each other. We hit it off immediately.

**JE:** What was her name?

**BR:** Mary Lynn Ryan. Her dad built the Altus Air Force Base and paved the turnpike from Oklahoma City to Bristow. We met and hit it off and married in 1962.

**JE:** So did you have children?

**BR:** Yes, we had three. Rebecca Ann, Molly Fritz and then Robert Joseph "Bob". Bob and Molly were twins. They were born in 1974.

**JE:** And Bob is with you today?

**BR:** He sure is. Of course he was an attorney too and I am delighted with that. When I first went with the firm I tried cases. That's how I started out. In those days we did everything.

**Chapter 11 – 10:28****Edward King Gaylord**

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**Bill Ross:** For instance, Streeter Flynn was on the boards of all of these companies. He was on the board of the Santa Fe railroad and on the board of OG&E. He never was on the board of OPUBCO, but he always went to their annual meetings and he would take me with him. So that's how I got hooked up pretty well with E.K. Gaylord. I represented Mr. Gaylord after Mr. Flynn passed away. He died in 1971 and I handled all of Mr. Gaylord's personal matters.

**John Erling:** As you've said, the firm represented OPUBCO. In time you were invited to the board meetings. That's when you met Mr. E.K. Gaylord. What was his full name?

**BR:** Edward King Gaylord.

**JE:** Where did the name King come from?

**BR:** I think it is very fitting. If you were to have known him, you would have thought so too. (Chuckle) I think it was Divine Providence, other than that I can't tell you. (Laughter) He was just a great person.

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

**BR:** He was very formal. I was 28 years old or so and he always called me Mr. Ross. He called me that until after Streeter Flynn died and I handled all of his work and we got very close. Then he started calling me Bill in about 1971. I remember when he first called me Bill because I was so shocked and pleased. I thought, oh boy, I am home now because he's calling me Bill. I think he had an inherent intelligence. It wasn't professorial. His mind was just so great that he could take everything down and meld it together where it would fit whatever was needed at the time. There's no one I admired more in my life than him.

**JE:** In reading about him—you can help me with this story. I understand that in 1902 when he was 29 years old he came to Oklahoma City.

**BR:** Yes. I think he was born in Kansas. At an early age he went out to Colorado. By the time he was 16, 17 or 18 he was running a streetcar between Cripple Creek and Victor.

By the time he was 19 or 20 he was working for the County Court Clerk in Cripple Creek. I think his brother had the paper in Colorado Springs. Anyway, he got a scholarship because of his faith at Colorado College, which is still a marvelous school today there in Colorado Springs. Somehow he got about \$5,000 together and he started looking for a paper. He ended up in Oklahoma City. He walked all over town in Oklahoma City and there were three or four music stores. He thought this place is more than just a boomtown. He felt like OKC was it—so that's how he decided to land here. Then he went to work for the man who owned The Oklahoman and eventually bought a minority interest in it. Then in later years he went on to buy the publishing company.

**JE:** According to this in 1918 he became president of the company.

**BR:** Yes he did.

**JE:** He bought out Roy Stafford for \$300,000.

**BR:** That may be right.

**JE:** And he became president of the company then?

**BR:** Right, and it was his from then on.

**JE:** Mr. Gaylord's wife—what was her name?

**BR:** Inez Kinney. She came from New York. She graduated from a school on the East Coast. She went to work with the YWCA when she got out of college. It just happened that a classmate of E.K.'s was her boss. The boss was a female and she had graduated from Colorado College with E.K. So she had this young girl that she was sending down to OKC to start the YWCA down here. She knew she was coming down here and that she didn't know anybody. She knew E.K., so she got in touch with him and said, "This girl is coming down to set up a YWCA in OKC. Would you see that she gets to meet some people and take care of her?" Well, he took care of her okay. (Chuckle) That worked out beautifully.

**JE:** We've talked about how he got into the newspaper business here, but then an opportunity comes along for WKY. His editor, Walter Harrison urged E.K. to buy the radio station in 1928 for \$5,000, which is a lot of money—but he was making that through the newspaper. Then the station makes a profit during the early years of the Depression. The radio station moved to the Skirvin Tower in downtown OKC.

**BR:** Of course, he had other businesses too. During the Depression they couldn't get the paper delivered. I think some of the trucking companies that were delivering the paper couldn't do it anymore. So he started a company called Mistletoe Express. The reason it was started was to deliver the paper all over the state, but it turned into an actual company. In fact, it was a lot like an in-state Federal Express. They delivered the paper all over and it was very lucrative. Then they delivered other papers like the *Farmer—Stockman*. Oklahoma City was a great cow town and that was a great newspaper. It operated for years too.

**JE:** This is also very interesting. In November of 1939, RCA Radio Corporation of America conducted a WKY-sponsored demonstration of this new medium known as television in the new Oklahoma City Municipal Auditorium. Then as you referred earlier, WKY-TV goes on the air in June of 1949 and it becomes the state's first television station at the same time that WKY is experimenting with something new called FM radio. Here is a man who was a newspaperman who gets very involved in the early stages of broadcasting.

**BR:** He was the bravest man I have ever known I'm telling you. He was a visionary. He could see these things. There were television stations all over the country that were going broke. He bought seven or eight of them. He knew that they would be fine eventually. He had his

cash cow taking care of everything so he was able to build his empire. Of course, then the law changed and he had to sell all of those TV stations and all of that.

**JE:** But you wonder where he came up with \$300,000. In 1918 Gaylord became president of the company after Stafford sold his controlling interest for \$300,000.

**BR:** I think he stayed pretty close to his brother and his brother owned The Gazette in Colorado Springs. But there were other people involved here. He had the bankers and some people in California. They were investors in all of this too.

**JE:** So it wasn't just his, he had investors?

**BR:** Yes, The three families were still involved and on the board.

**JE:** Did he have a sense of humor?

**BR:** Oh yes.

**JE:** So there was a very warm sensitive side to him?

**BR:** Always warm, yes. He was so insightful. I remember when he was sick. He wouldn't go to a doctor here because in the first place, he didn't want anybody to know he had to go to the doctor. In the second place, he was afraid that they were going to operate on him or something. His back killed him. This was when he was in his 90s. Edith took him down to Dallas. He had a doctor down there that he liked really well who was very conservative. He would put him in braces and everything to give him some relief. He needed some papers from OKC, so I took them down to Dallas to the hospital. I just happened to take him a newspaper. It was the day that Amon Carter happened to sell the Fort Worth paper to Los Angeles. I mentioned it to him and showed it to him and he said, "Oh, my goodness they paid \$50 million for it. That's way too much." I said, "I wonder why they did it and he said, "Oh my boy, for the power—for the power." He was all stretched out in bed in weights on him. I said, "The annual meetings are Monday." He said, "I'll be there for that." I said, "Do you think you ought to?" He said, "Oh yes, I'll be there." I don't know how he did it, but come Monday, here he came walking in by himself. Nobody even knew that he had had anything except a good weekend.

**JE:** He was a man of short stature wasn't he?

**BR:** Yes, he was about 5'6" or 5'7".

**JE:** He must have had a disk problem. Back in those days they used weights to try and stretch your spine out.

**BR:** Somebody here in OKC wanted to work on a disk or operate on him and he didn't want that at all.

**JE:** So he never had his backed fixed?

**BR:** No.

**Chapter 12 — 11:14****Edith Gaylord**

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**John Erling:** The personal work you did for him—what kind of work was that?

**Bill Ross:** It was his will. We would redo it about once a year for sure or twice a year.

**JE:** Then one day he announces to you that Edith, his daughter, is coming back?

**BR:** Yes, that was in the late 1960s. He said, “She’ll need an attorney, can you represent her?” I said, “Of course.” He said, “Okay, we’ll have lunch.” So he took us to lunch up at the Beacon Club and then I started working with her.

**JE:** She worked at the newspaper here for a while?

**BR:** She did. She went to Colorado College. Then she worked for the Associated Press in New York. There weren’t very many women with the AP at that time, but Eleanor Roosevelt started having press conferences in Washington, D.C. One day she announced at her press conference that she wanted women to come to the conferences.

**JE:** Did she only want women? Or was it that she at least wanted a woman in the room?

**BR:** Well, that’s probably what it was. Anyway, AP started scrambling around because they didn’t have any women—they were all men. So here is Edith up in New York working for AP and I guess she was doing pretty good work. So they sent her down to Washington and she started working with Eleanor Roosevelt and they became great friends. Edith became president of the Women’s Press Association in 1944. Later on it merged with The National Press Club and her picture is up at there at the National Press Club as one of their presidents. We saw it when we were up there this summer.

**JE:** Did she talk about Eleanor to you?

**BR:** They were just friends. She admired her. Edith was much, much younger than Mrs. Roosevelt.

**JE:** The President, FDR, died in April 1945.

**BR:** Yes.

**JE:** She would have been there to cover that death?

**BR:** Yes, she was there. Madam Chiang Kai-shek during the war was in the United States. They had a tour across the country and Edith went with her. I think Eleanor Roosevelt set that up.

**JE:** So then either she wanted to come back to OKC or her father asked her to come back?

**BR:** She wanted to come back.

**JE:** Okay, so she came back to be with her father. Were they close?

**BR:** Oh yes. They had the same birthday, March 5th. They were really close.

**JE:** So when she comes back, people started asking her for gifts I suppose because they knew of the wealth that was there and charity?

**BR:** Yes, this was one of the things that she needed help with. E.K. saw that. I think one of the first things she did when she came back was she got on the board of Sunbeam. She got some liquidity. In the late 1960s and early 1970s they had a big interest in a paper mill down in Texas. This gave her a substantial amount of liquidity. Then she started making some substantial gifts. She made them anonymously. None of the Gaylords ever wanted any publicity over anything they did. They were very sensitive about that, which I thought was a mistake. Of course, I was 30 years old and I wasn't going to say anything. But looking back, I just think it was a mistake because a lot of people didn't know what they did and what they contributed to. They thought they were arrogant and stingy and everything else, but they weren't. They were very, very generous people, but they just didn't want anyone to know what they were doing. If somebody came to Edith and told her that they were trying to raise money for some project and it would really help if they could use her name, she would never refuse them. But as far as going out and trying to solicit publicity for herself or her family or anything else it was taboo.

**JE:** Mr. Gaylord too enjoyed giving?

**BR:** Oh yes.

**JE:** That was anonymous too?

**BR:** Yes. He never told anybody anything. When he was doing his will he said, "How can we keep this quiet after I'm not here?"

**JE:** So then Edith sets up two trusts.

**BR:** Yes, in 1982.

**JE:** They were?

**BR:** The Inasmuch Foundation and Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation. She set them up at the same time. She said that she had a name picked out for one of them. She said, "I'd like for it to be called Inasmuch Foundation. Do you know what that means?" I said, "I don't have the faintest idea." She said, "You can figure that one out." Well, I couldn't. Anyway it is from the Book of Matthew.

**JE:** When Jesus is talking.

**BR:** Yes. She wasn't religious at all. I don't ever recall seeing her in a church in my life. But she wanted that name very much.

**JE:** What was the mission of that foundation?

**BR:** To do good deeds, except those that pertained to journalism. So it focused on things like health, education, welfare, anything that you can think of except that pertains to journalism. That's exactly where we are today.

**JE:** Then the mission of the journalism foundation?

**BR:** It's just what it says. It's Ethics and Excellence in Journalism. We support all over the country on that. Inasmuch is pretty much limited to Oklahoma, with just a little bit out

in Colorado. Ethics and Excellence in Journalism—it would be nice if we could do more here—but it’s all over the country and that’s the way she wanted it. Edith wanted Inasmuch Foundation for Oklahoma, but she would specifically do things that were beyond that. For instance, they had a terrible flood in Africa and they were asking for help. She called me and asked me to send them money quickly because they needed it. They had a tsunami somewhere and it was the same deal. If it was a major calamity worldwide, she wanted to be in on that too. Then on other things, if people had projects they were raising money for, she liked to match funds. You would always like to see 100 people give \$10 than one person give \$1,000—that meant a lot more to her.

**JE:** So that more people could get involved and have the feeling of giving and helping and she would match their gift then and double it.

**BR:** Yes, she would match it or triple it or whatever needed to be done to get it done. I know she had a project one time up at OSU. A number of professors gave in the hundreds of dollars and some students gave in the tens and I think they raised about \$10,000. Edith gave the other \$90,000 for the project. But she was just thrilled that the students gave.

**JE:** She was teaching us to give, to learn to give.

**BR:** Yes. She thought that that was so important, which obviously it is.

**JE:** So it made her very happy to see those results and to see projects built or developed and completed.

**BR:** Yes. In the last five years of her life, her health completely failed and she hardly ever left the house. But she got the greatest joy out of getting the report on what her funding had done for people and projects. She was very intuitive.

**JE:** She had a brother?

**BR:** Yes, Edward Lewis and she had a sister Virginia.

**JE:** Politically?

**BR:** She and her brother were not akin at all. I always said Edith made Karl Marx look like one of the Pharaohs and Ed made one of the Pharaohs look like Karl Marx. They were very fond of each other, but don’t get them started on politics.

**JE:** Would you ever be around those discussions?

**BR:** No, because they were around each other when they had them and they didn’t work. (Chuckle) But she would read the paper about whether he would be doing something and I would hear from him.

**JE:** Because he became a publisher of the paper?

**BR:** Yes, after E.K. died he became the publisher. Edith was on the board. I mean they just got along great as long as you did not get them off on the conservative or liberal factors because sparks would fly.

**JE:** But her father, E.K.—

**BR:** He was conservative too.

**JE:** Did Edith and her father have these kinds of conversations?

**BR:** I don't think they did. But I know that Ed and Edith were certainly divided on things.

**JE:** She was the one who advanced women's right and the underprivileged and the NAACP.

**BR:** She came back here and immediately got involved in the NAACP. Of course on women's rights, I guess it would be a breach of ethics if I told you the things she did on those lines. (Laughter) Even in her own family, she certainly wanted to make sure that the girls had a say in everything and that it wasn't just left up to the men.

**JE:** Point well taken. You wonder if some of her thought processes were formed by her relationship with Eleanor Roosevelt. I mean, she just naturally thought that way but certainly had to be encouraged by her?

**BR:** I am sure they were.

**JE:** Yes.

**BR:** I am sure they were because I don't think women were that strong unless they were in a position of some power. Of course, Eleanor Roosevelt, she just gave the directive. They were good friends. Mrs. Roosevelt was a mentor to her as Streeter Flynn was to me.

**JE:** Did you develop a relationship with Edward L. Gaylord?

**BR:** Yes, it just didn't have both Edith and Ed. I mean obviously I represented him for the publishing company matters. He was executor of his dad's estate. We worked together all of these years and everything just went fine, but he knew that I was committed to Edith. I told E.K. I would be. I had to do that. I enjoyed working with him and I think he enjoyed working with me.

**JE:** Because you had become like best friends with Edith?

**BR:** Oh yes. She was a dear friend.

**JE:** Like an older sister to you?

**BR:** Yes. It was like she was family. She didn't have any children. She liked my children.

**JE:** She did marry didn't she?

**BR:** Yes, Harper and that didn't work out too well. It didn't work out at all as a matter of fact. They were divorced just before she came back here.

**JE:** So then she lived the rest of her life as a single person?

**BR:** Yes.

**Chapter 13 — 7:07****Student Advice**

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**John Erling:** We did come then recently to the sale of the newspaper and all of the holdings of the family?

**Bill Ross:** Yes.

**JE:** They sold to the Anschutz Family owned by Philip Anschutz.

**BR:** Yes, out in Denver.

**JE:** He is known for his conservative values as well?

**BR:** That is what I understand although I've never met him.

**JE:** Were you involved in the sale of all of that?

**BR:** Well, the foundations have their ownership positions in the publishing company, so we were, but I never even met Mr. Anschutz.

**JE:** Did you go through all of that and wonder what E.K. was thinking about the sale and would he have approved it?

**BR:** I think he absolutely would have approved it. The situation was so different than it even was 10 years ago. There are so many changes. Christy did a fine job.

**JE:** Christy?

**BR:** Christy Gaylord Everest, Edward L. Gaylord's daughter and E.K.'s granddaughter. She was the president of the paper until it was sold. She handled it for the family.

**JE:** So E.K. would have blessed the sale and thought it was the right thing to do?

**BR:** Oh, I don't think there's no question about it. I mean here is a buyer who will carry it on and he's as conservative as I am. I think he would have been so proud of Christy and the way she handled everything. I think it was the best thing to do.

**JE:** Because that was all of their holdings, it wasn't just the newspaper—it was everything?

**BR:** Yes, everything.

**JE:** Today in 2012 you are chairman of the foundations' board of directors?

**BR:** Yes. I am chairman of both Inasmuch Foundation and Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation.

**JE:** And your son is?

**BR:** He is President and CEO of both of those foundations.

**JE:** What do you think about this relationship that you started at that law firm? By the way, I'm struck by the fact that one your firm's clients was Santa Fe Railway, which was the train line that your grandfather came into the Land Run on. (Chuckle) Sometimes it seems like things are all meant to be when you look back and that you started that relationship that

here today can continue to do such great work through these two foundations. That has to make you feel pretty good.

**BR:** You are very kind. I do feel very good. I enjoy it very much. I can't tell you how much fun it is working with Bob. The fact that he could fire me in an instance is terrifying you know? (Laughter) But you know him. I tell everybody that he could do that, but then of course he's out of the will. (Laughter) Anyway, it's a great pleasure. I look forward to coming down here every morning.

**JE:** The trust that you as a young man were able to establish was where it really started because if he didn't like you, you would have been out of here.

**BR:** Well, I would have, but actually Streeter Flynn was my senior partner at the firm. He was the one that had the relationship with Mr. Gaylord. Being with E.K. was very special. As I look back, you don't realize how special things are at the time, but as I look back, the whole thing was just great.

**JE:** Why do you think you and E.K. worked well together?

**BR:** I don't know. I admired him so much, but I don't know what he saw in me. There had to be something for the whole thing to work out. It's obvious that anybody in town would have liked that as much as I did, but it was just a very pleasant situation. I never felt anything except the joy of doing a good job for him and he recognized that.

**JE:** Yes.

**BR:** I guess to cap it all off, when he died, my wife and I were out in California on a little vacation in San Francisco and Edith called us so we flew back home.

**JE:** What month and year was this?

**BR:** It was May 1975. Nobody had even been in his office. Ed hadn't even been up there. So we went into his office and opened it up. He had taken a nap on this daybed in his office because his back was always hurting him. Beside him, crumpled up, was a copy of his will. He had been reading it. There was this instrument that I'd worked hard on and he had left it there on the floor. I don't know how often he read it, I don't know. It was all a mystery but a very pleasant one.

**JE:** I am sure he understood the tremendous respect you had for him and just your good demeanor. We sometimes don't know why two people click, but there's a spirit there.

**BR:** He was 101 when he died you know? By that time I was 45. I don't know, we just hit it off for some reason.

**JE:** What are you most proud of as you look back on your life?

**BR:** My kids. I am proud of Bob and I am proud of my other children and my grandchildren. I am proud of my city. I sit up here in this room. I like to eat lunch in here at this table where I can sit and look out at this (motioning to the view). It's so pretty. I remember that my dad used to say that he and his brothers had skinny dipped in 1895 when they were

five years old. That's all they had. They didn't have any nice pools or anything they had an old park down there. It was so crummy looking and to sit here and look at it today—it is so handsome now.

**JE:** This is all targeted toward students and people interested in history and so forth. What kind of advice would you give to students and young people who are graduating from college and heading out in the world?

**BR:** Well, everyone is different. I think everyone has to follow his or her own thoughts. I would suggest that they look around them and see if where they are is every bit as good as going somewhere else. If you have the opportunity to stay in Oklahoma and get established, you should give some thought to giving that a chance. I think that will pay off greatly for them. It did for me. Take advantage of it because I think there's an awful lot right here.

**JE:** How would you like to be remembered?

**BR:** I guess I would like to be remembered as a devoted Oklahoman.

**JE:** Is there anything other than money?

**BR:** (Laughter) Oh yes! Yes, there is. There's grief, strife, woe, misery, poverty, sickness and disease, hatred, scorn and I could go on and on.

**JE:** (Laughter)

**BR:** (Laughter) Did Bob put you up to that? I knew he did. (Laughter)

**JE:** I want to thank you for this very fascinating time that we have spent with you. You've touched on the Civil War, you've touched on the Land Run. You have connection to World War I and WWII. To follow your career has been fascinating—this journey that we've taken with you today and I thank you very much.

**BR:** Well, thank you for this interview and giving me the opportunity to do this. It's been very pleasant for me.

## Chapter 14 – 0:30

### Conclusion

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**Announcer:** You have just heard William J. “Bill” Ross tell his Oklahoma story on [VoicesofOklahoma.com](http://VoicesofOklahoma.com). Please check our For Further Reading Section on our website for additional information. Mr. Ross joins many other Oklahomans in telling their inspiring stories on this Oklahoma oral history website made possible by our generous sponsors who share our mission to preserve Oklahoma's legacy one voice at a time at [VoicesofOklahoma.com](http://VoicesofOklahoma.com).