

Chapter 1 - 0:47

Introduction

Announcer: Every great event needs a great promoter. Born in Oklahoma City in 1939, it was as a college student and an Air Force officer that Lee Allan Smith learned to become a world-class planner of special events. That early training prepared him to be Oklahoma's greatest promoter and the man behind the scenes of the most significant galas in state history. The Stars and Stripes shows, Oklahoma's Jubilee, the dedication of the State Capitol dome and the celebration of the Oklahoma Centennial would not have been as majestic without Lee Allan Smith's leadership. This interview will help you get to know the man behind the scenes of our state's greatest celebrations. We thank our founding sponsors and underwriters for making Lee Allan Smith's interview possible on VoicesofOklahoma.com.

Chapter 2 - 4:48

The Early Years

John Erling: Today is August 6, 2009. My name is John Erling. On the outset, if you'll state your name, your age, your date of birth and where you were born.

Lee Allan Smith: Lee Allan Smith, born November 14th, 1929. I am 79 years old and I will be 80 in November of this year.

JE: Where are we recording this interview?

LAS: We are recording this in the offices of Ackerman McQueen and OK Events, a subsidiary of Ackerman McQueen in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

JE: Where were you born?

LAS: Oklahoma City, Oklahoma at St. Anthony's Hospital.

JE: Your parents?

LAS: My mother was Florence Phelps. She grew up in Shawnee. Her grandfather started

the first newspaper in Shawnee, Seminole, Wewoka, Tecumseh and Ada. My father was Williams Ernest Smith and he originally was from Texas. My mother came from Kansas originally. They are both deceased of course.

JE: Your father was musical wasn't he?

LAS: Well, he played in a band, yes, but he was a salesman, a traveling salesman for that matter and that's where I got a lot of my experience watching him as I went with him on trips during the summertime. They had four boys. I am the youngest of four. My other three brothers have since passed on and I miss them dearly.

JE: So you were born in 1929 at the start of the Depression?

LAS: Yes, that's what they tell me.

JE: Do you know how your family had been affected by those Depression days?

LAS: Oh, I remember it being felt, but as far as the dust blowing in my yard, I don't remember that at all.

JE: Your family, I think they attended church—there was a church background?

LAS: Yes. As a child, my father was a Baptist and my mother was a very staunch First Presbyterian Church member and that's where I went to church through my youth. We had a church on 9th and Robinson in Oklahoma City and then later built a new one on 25th and Western. It was built while I was in the Air Force at the time, but that's the church that we belonged to.

JE: Where did you go to elementary school?

LAS: I went to Wilson Grade School and then I went to Harding Junior High School and then proceeded to go to Classen High School, which later became Northwest Classen High School, but they do have a school now called Classen that is for talented musical students. I graduated from Classen in 1947. There was a fellow by the name of Ed Gaylord that went to Classen and there was a fellow by the name of G.T. Blankenship. He was a member of the board of regents for many years—two terms. Then I went to Norman to the University of Oklahoma and graduated from business school. Then I went into the Air Force for a two-year stint following my graduation. I started out in Vienna, Austria and then went to Munich, Germany and then went on to Tripoli, Libya, North Africa.

JE: Back in the third grade, do you recall starting a newspaper in the third grade?

LAS: Yes. Several of us—one of my friend's fathers had a printing machine. We were talking about my grandfather's background in newspaper, so we started a little weekly newspaper that lasted for a year or so.

JE: Do you still have any copies of that?

LAS: I have a copy someplace.

JE: That's great. Your neighborhood, do you have wonderful memories growing up there and was it filled with friends?

LAS: Oh yes. We called it the 20th Street Gang. I had moved two or three times on 20th Street, starting on 400 block and then moving to 700 and then 900 block. When my mother passed away, we were living at 924 Northwest 20th Street. But my early life was on the 400 block of 20th Street, which is Heritage Hills. The house is still there. They've remodeled it several times. I drive by it. It's always fun to go by and see it and kind of relive some of those memories with so many people living on that street. I hate to start naming names, because you will run out and forget somebody, but there were a lot of fine people that became great businessmen and great entertainers and great sportspeople.

JE: Can you mention some of the names?

LAS: Well, one of them was Paul Hanson. He coached at many places, but he was better known at OCU first with Abe Lemons, and then he went on to Oklahoma State and coached there.

JE: And he was a playmate in that neighborhood?

LAS: Yes, he was a playmate. There was a guy by the name of Bill Harrah who had a basketball net in the backyard and we were over there at his house paying horse all summer long and mostly after school. But Paul Hanson was the star player for our team or whom we wanted to be with.

JE: Bill Harrah, what did he go on to do?

LAS: He went on to OU and he played baseball on a national championship team under Coach Jack Baer. He was a second baseman. They were just a great group of people and we had great fun and played basketball softball and baseball because we were close to Wilson Grade School.

JE: Did you play sports?

LAS: I thought I did. I wasn't as good as some of the coaches thought. Yes, I played baseball at Classen and I lettered at OU although it was short-lived. I went on to become the manager in the last year. I traveled and that was fun with all those guys that were on the team.

Chapter 3 - 5:35

Names & Places

Lee Allan Smith: It gave me opportunities that always made connections and connections in my life have always played an important role. For example, we went on a baseball trip to Lawrence, Kansas and we went over to my fraternity house, Phi Gamma Delta. I ran into a guy and we went out on the town and it was Dean Smith, who of course later coached at North Carolina basketball to great heights and he's of course in the Hall of Fame and

a wonderful guy. So, those kinds of things are associated with my experiences, which are sure fun to remember.

John Erling: Al Rosen the major leaguer, played for the Oklahoma City Indians.

LAS: He was a hero to all of us that loved baseball as I did that went out there to the ballpark to see Al Rosen and Ray Boone, who has several sons and grandsons in the major league. But Al Rosen was the favorite of many. He went on to be the manager for the New York Giants. I sent him a few things and he wrote back a personal note and said, "I had the greatest experience of my life being in Oklahoma and playing around Oklahoma City and Texas." It was just nice of him to do that. I sent him a book by a local artist here named Fitzgerald. The book displays a lot of great places from Oklahoma. I just thought I ought to send him something from remembering how wonderful he was to me. He had me in the dugout one time when I won a contest to be the person who kept the score sheet. I won a bicycle and a baseball mitt and he was my main man when I went to the dugout. He was so sweet and wonderful to me so I have great memories with him.

JE: And he spent many years as a major league player?

LAS: Oh yes. He played for the Cleveland Indians and he was one of their finest players.

JE: I remember because I had one of his baseball cards as a matter of fact.

LAS: Did you? I've got one of them in my office.

JE: Curt Gowdy was a voice for the Oklahoma City Indians?

LAS: Yeah, Curt was a wonderful guy. We were very fortunate in Oklahoma to have a couple of announcers in the Hall of Fame. Bob Murphy was one, but Curt Gowdy and his wife are dear friends. Curt married an Oklahoma City girl. I used to go down and watch him do play-by-play by the ticker tape. He would take those sticks and hit them together so you would hear the base hit. Even before him, I remember Ted Andrews was an announcer and he used to always say, "It's a hit clean as Ivory." I never will forget that. I always will remember that because I thought that was neat. I made my mother buy Ivory soap all the time. (Laughter) But Curt was a wonderful guy. We remained friends for a long time. He is of course from Wyoming, but he claimed Oklahoma City to be one of his main interests and hometown.

JE: As we follow your life then, there was a tragedy because in 1942 you lost your father?

LAS: Yes. I was at Harding at the time and they sent some relatives by the school to bring me home. I didn't know what it was until I got home and learned that my father was killed in a hotel fire in Wichita, Kansas in the Texan Hotel where I had been with him earlier that summer on a business trip. Well, it was a business trip and also it was to visit my oldest brother Donald who had just entered the service at Sheppard Air Force Base. Yes, that was tragic. He was 57 years old, so I never had a father but I had three brothers and a mother that I think took good care of me.

Chapter 4 - 4:07
High School Fraternity

John Erling: Somewhere along the line in your early years, your sales job was selling Carnation Ice Cream?

Lee Allan Smith: Carnation Ice Cream was located on 23rd Street and I went from there to 20th, 21st and 22nd Street and from Robinson to Blackwelder, twice a day selling ice cream out of a cart, jingling bells and just walking it. I didn't need to be in shape then, I wasn't overweight at that time. It was a fun job and that was one of the first ones but I guess the first one was throwing newspapers.

JE: For The Oklahoman?

LAS: For The Oklahoman.

JE: What age were you then?

LAS: I was probably 14. It was fun throwing the newspapers too, but of course in today's environment I don't know if I would have been willing to go out early in the morning throwing those papers. But I used to look forward to stopping over at 25th Street, near Classen to go to get some pastries at Kamp's Grocery, which is a memory that I treasure of my time throwing newspapers.

JE: Did you go back to "collect" as we said? I did that too. I delivered newspapers. Did you have to go and collect the money?

LAS: Oh yeah.

JE: Where you knock on the door and always say, "I'm here to collect."

LAS: Oh yeah. I prayed that the one or two that I had would increase and that's the monthlies, where they would pay by the month and then yearly. But you know, most of us, I think a lot of us, pay by the year. So that would have been a nice savings. No, if we had to collect and go back in the back of a house where somebody might be living in a garage apartment and collect, yeah.

JE: And then you ripped off a little piece of paper and handed it to them as a receipt? We had that in our book.

LAS: Yeah. (Laughter) I don't want to get into detail about some of those collections and how some of those people would come to their front doors. It scared me or shocked me, or whatever you want to say.

JE: In high school, Classen High School, you belonged to a High School Fraternity?

LAS: Yes I did.

JE: And that was?

LAS: Phi Lambda Epsilon.

JE: That turned out to be a wonderful fun experience for you?

LAS: Well, yes it was. I wasn't a clique. You know a lot of people knock it. I think they made them close down and compared it to some private organization whether it be the KKK or what. It was just so wrong. I went over the other day to this place to look at the scrapbook that detailed about 30 years and had all the people that were a part of it. There were Admiral Bill Crowe and all of these famous people that made it. It was a good experience because you learned a lot of different things and how to get along with people and so forth. But they weren't the only people we associated with. We ran around with everybody and enjoyed the experience of high school. Yes, that was a good experience and I think it was valuable to many of us and to most of all of us that were in that fraternity and a couple of other ones that were represented at Classen.

JE: You probably made contacts with people then?

LAS: Forever, through other fraternities too and for that matter other Classen graduates that weren't in a fraternity. I made great connections and great memories. I would still go back. We still have fun sometimes just about on a weekly basis with different ones, lunch and so forth. High school for anybody is a fabulous experience and memory.

JE: Were there any names out of that that we might know that went on to careers?

LAS: Well, yes I was going to say one, David Hall.

JE: Former governor of our state?

LAS: Right, DeVier Pierson who is a Washington lawyer. He is a great debater there and another debater along with Bill Crowe is Carl Edwards. Gene Edwards now he actually has two sons in Oklahoma City now and Carl is the head of the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation. There are so many people. I remember G.W. James, whose Dad was the owner of the Skirvin Hotel here in town. In Tulsa, there are several people that moved from here. Tom Brett for example, Judge Thomas Brett over in Tulsa and there's a lot of fellows like that that moved on to San Antonio that still come back for reunions. You'd be amazed at the people that they put out through Classen. As they have done everywhere, you know Tulsa Central and all over. Alan Greenberg for example was in my class. He was a couple of years older than I was and he went on to become the CEO of Bear Stearns.

JE: And then you did play baseball for Classen High School? What position?

LAS: Yes. I was an outfielder out in left field.

JE: Were you a hitter? Did you hit?

LAS: Oh, I hit pretty well. I went into softball after that with a bunch of friends from school. That was easier to hit, that ball being bigger it didn't dip quite so much on me. (Laughter) The curve ball killed me.

Chapter 5 - 4:20**Bud Wilkinson**

John Erling: So you graduated from Classen High School and then you went on to OU?

Lee Allan Smith: Right.

JE: And that was a good experience. You made friends with the President George Cross.

LAS: Yes, George Cross. He and his wife both are wonderful people. I had a great relationship with Dr. Cross. I remember when he would be interviewed like this and if you would be asking him something pointedly he would say, "No comment." That was very famous to all of us to know that he would say "no comment". But I credit him with our beginning. I credit Bud Wilkinson or whomever you want to for football, but George Cross wanted a football team that we would all be proud of. He had a different way of saying it, but he was a great guy. He kidded me a lot because I didn't like one course when I went down there and that was Botany. Of course, that was his course that was what he taught, so we had a lot of joking to do about that, but he is a wonderful, wonderful man and it was a great experience to be a friend of his.

JE: Dr. George Cross, he was committing himself to have a good university and he had a saying?

LAS: I think it went like, "I want to build this university to such excellence so that we will have a university that the football team could be proud of." He was emphasizing that football was going to be king at the University of Oklahoma, as it later became.

JE: So then, the first Coach Tatum.

LAS: Tatum was the first coach that they got under the leadership of George Cross.

JE: And then Bud Wilkinson?

LAS: Then Bud came in about a year later. He started out and we played a close game with the Army when they were with Doc Blanchard and their great team and had Mr. Inside and Mr. Outside. We came close to beating them and then from then on we continued to win. He had two winning streaks, the main one being 47 straight games without a defeat. He was a hero in these parts and he went on later to coach the St. Louis Cardinals and it wasn't a very difficult chore for him to do that. Of course, right before that he had run for U.S. Senator and lost to that fellow by the man of Harris.

JE: As a young man you weren't around Bud, but I think as you were an adult you did have an association with him. What was that and how did you see him as a man?

LAS: Well, he was a close friend of Carl Anderson in town who played at Army and was the assistant coach at OU for a while. He has since passed away. His sons are still here and they put up a nice tribute to the University of Oklahoma. I was around him for this golf

tournament called Swing For Sight Golf Tournament, which had Bud Wilkinson and Barry Switzer doing it. I got acquainted with him then. Then he remarried. His first wife was Mary whom I thought was so wonderful. He married this other lady from Saint Louis. So when they were living here for a short while I would have dinner with him on a couple of occasions. We just had the occasion to be over at Carl Anderson's house quite a few times when he was here visiting him. He also had a very good friend here in Oklahoma City by the name of David Davenport. I talked to David the other day because we are building four coaches statues down in Norman. Bennie Owen, Bud Wilkinson, Barry Switzer and Bob Stoops. So I have been in touch with Bud's son to be developing the pose we want for Bud's statue in Norman. This is also going along with adding Sam Bradford to the four Heisman's we have down there. But Bud I met also when we were doing the Olympic Festival. We had Bud come back for a lot of those things and he also was appointed by President Kennedy and later Nixon to be head of the fitness program. Bud asked me to do the program in Norman for fitness in Oklahoma and we did and we associated with that a lot. We brought Bob Mathias in. He was a fraternity brother from California and he comes in and we would have a nice program down there with other entertainers and we would put on quite a show for that. Then we were doing the Stars and Stripes Show later and I went to Washington to try and visit with Bud and try and get his help with trying to get some folks from Washington, D.C. to come in for the Stars and Stripes Show or mainly to try and at least get some telegrams sent and we did and he helped us a lot with that. So we had some nice relationships.

JE: A calm easy-going kind of guy is the way I viewed him from afar.

LAS: I think so. I think his football players could tell you more about that. (Laughter) I found him always to be pleasant. He was just a regular guy. I talked a lot to his friends about him. He was with Lindsey Nelson for a long time on the ESPN days and Lindsey told me he was fun and good to work with, so I assume he's like that to everybody.

Chapter 6 - 4:50

OU·Military

John Erling: Then about in 1948 you worked as a young man in the campaign headquarters of Robert S. Kerr as he ran for the U.S. Senate.

Lee Allan Smith: I went to knock on the door downtown. I was with a good friend of mine Jack Catlett. His dad was legal counsel for Kerr. We laugh about it today, because he should have gotten the job because he had the relationship with his dad. But I did get the job

and I enjoyed that. A lot of people came into that office and I finally ended up being in the mailroom. That was a good experience and we enjoyed it.

JE: Were you around Mr. Kerr?

LAS: Not enough to know him. I just remember his mannerisms and reflect on the memory of how he used to eat his hamburger, which is a little different than some of us do. I just remember things like that. But his son Breene was at Classen High School when I was. We were in the same class, but I didn't know him that well.

JE: I think you would have begun your event planning at OU in your fraternity as a junior?

LAS: Fraternity life for me was outstanding. I was in Tulsa yesterday speaking to a bunch of my FIJI brothers about things.

JE: Okay the fraternity was?

LAS: The fraternity was FIJI, Phi Gamma Delta. They call it FIJI. I was over there meeting a lot of people I didn't know and seeing a lot that I did know. Lindsay Perkins, his son Mark is running for Mayor of Tulsa. John Johnson, he played golf at OU and many other fine Tulsa alums are over there. But when I was in school I wasn't the president. I was rush chairman, I was social chairman and I was intramural chairman. Each one of those gave me experiences that have led me to do the things that I have done. The second part of doing those things was in the Air Force and then what I am doing now. But I can honestly tell you, if I were to tell you several of the things I did in those positions, you might see, or at least I would see, why I have enjoyed to continue to do event planning and marketing.

JE: You drew on that experience for many, many years I am quite certain.

LAS: Yes, I have kind of created in myself the ability to try and have ideas and have vision and to frankly be a salesman of sorts. Because of all the things I have done, I can't do anything well, if I have done it well, without money. And so I have been a fundraiser and it has turned out to be enjoyable because people still accept my calls because the previous event or whatever they were involved in, they were happy and that's what we try to do. Then you have all kinds of volunteers. So it has paid off through the years and I have enjoyed it.

JE: Active duty in the Air Force, where were you?

LAS: I went to Lackland Air Force Base first for my uniform and to get prepared. I was there about two weeks and then I came home for about four days and then I was shipped to New York City for an I&E School that was on Fort Slocum. It was run by the Navy and operated by the Army. It was a mish-mash of departments in the military. But I&E that means Information & Education School. I met about 30 great guys from Missouri and Texas A&M and all over the country. They were all in event marketing or mostly sports. I made great friends there and from there we all went overseas right away. Many of them went to France and several of them went to Germany and I ended up in Vienna,

Austria. It was a wonderful experience in that beautiful city. Our base was in the Russian zone. I sometimes spent the night there but mostly I stayed in my hotel in downtown Vienna. Then I was transferred to Munich, Germany. Neubiberg was the name of the base. I stayed there until I had about six months left of duty and then I went to Tripoli, North Africa to a place called Wheelus Air Base, one of the largest bases in the history of the United States. I was able to do some event marketing there and I finished up my career there like opening and building a golf course there with sand greens. One of the main things we did is we had a Giblee Bowl. A Giblee Bowl is kind of like a windstorm or a tornado really with sand. You couldn't see your hand in front of your face. It was a famous name, so we started the Giblee Bowl. I said we wanted to do a Thanksgiving Day game and I'd get two teams and they didn't think we could get any. So I called the fifth division headquarters and the general, the head of it was from Enid, Oklahoma. So there again I made a contact. By the way, the base commander was from El Reno, Oklahoma, Rollen B. Anthis. General Anthis encouraged it. I called this fellow and he helped me get a few well-known names to come over and play that game. We had mascots and a giraffe and a donkey and we had cheerleaders and a band. The nice thing about it is that it was able to be a nice thing in my file. The general wrote and thanked me because the King Idris, not Gaddafi, but King Idris thanked us profusely for that experience and sent a letter to all of us. King Idris later wanted to have a zoo. He wanted us to start one and when the King tells you to do something you do it. So we started a zoo and he helped us by getting us some animals from that country. It was a great experience and it did lead me into more event marketing.

Chapter 7 - 4:30

Radio & TV

John Erling: You served in the Air Force until 1955.

Lee Allan Smith: Right.

JE: Then out of the Air Force you took various jobs and then eventually went to work for WKY?

LAS: Yes. Right. In college, I also sold clothing at Stern's Clothing Store and then in the summertime I sold clothes for Park's Clothing Store.

JE: Both of these were downtown?

LAS: No, Parks was on 23rd Street and Stern's was downtown, it was an old-time wonderful clothing store that was well-known by most people in the early days. Then when I got out

of the service, I went to work at Stern's and Park's on 23rd Street. A sales manager came in from WKY and we talked and he went back to talk to the manager who was another fraternity brother of mine, that didn't hire me because it looked like it was too close for him to do so. But when the sales manager said he wanted to hire me, he said it was okay with him. So I had my start then with WKY Radio and then later television for a long, long time.

JE: Danny Williams was a broadcaster at the time?

LAS: Yes, he was doing a lot of TV shows. He was a super talent and a very bright and smart individual. He did Danny's Day later. I got him to come back on the radio. We put together quite a group of disk jockeys that were great and we became number one. After being with NBC so long, KOCY started with rock and it took over the number one spot. Because of our coverage also we switched to rock and roll and dropped some old shows and became number one. We had good competition except I must say that we didn't have as many stations as you have now in the markets. Particularly in Oklahoma City, we only had four full-time stations and three daytime stations. So to be number one was good, but it wasn't like being number one today because of so many stations competing with you.

JE: That station, WKY was 50,000 watts?

LAS: No, it was 5,000. KOMA was 50,000 watts.

JE: Okay.

LAS: But our directional signal was good, but not as superior as KOMA, which went all the way into New Mexico and beyond much farther. Statewide it was outstanding. When we would go to sell time on the station, our coverage statewide was the most important, because that's what they were looking at. So I remember going to New York and I opened up one time with a presentation saying we've lost half of our audience. They thought what in the world are you talking about. But when we said we were the oldest station west of the Mississippi and we had 100 percent and we only have 50 percent now, tongue in cheek you know. Competition became stiffer. But Danny Williams started out. He was great and he hired a great bunch of disk jockeys. But we had great news and weather that was important as well as promotions and prizes that sustained us well.

JE: You were manager at the time?

LAS: Well, I started out as a salesman, then I became sales manager and then I became manager. I went into television and I became assistant general manager and then president and manager of TV.

JE: Some of the disk jockeys back there with Danny do you remember some of those names?

LAS: Sure. Chuck Broyles was a great one. He has since passed. Chuck Dunaway who later bought many stations around the country and who was quite good. Ronnie Kaye who is

still on the air and is doing pops was a fabulous and talented guy. Dale Wehba and Don Wallace who also had a TV show, a fishing show, he was one of the great jocks for us.

JE: All of this time you also kept active with OU?

LAS: Yes, I have remained active with them in various areas of support in any way I could be of support.

JE: One day you were at a basketball game and you saw somebody there that you took a liking to.

LAS: Yes, I was down in Norman after I got out of the service and I went to the basketball game with a friend. I was down there serving the fraternity a little bit that I have mentioned. I looked over and it wasn't the sweater that got me, it was the face. I can remember she was in a black sweater is all and I was asking around who it was. I found out who it was and it turned out to be DeAnn Dudenhoeffer from Grandfield, Oklahoma. I got to meet her and I started dating her and I always joked that she wanted to change her name from Dudenhoeffer to Smith. But anyway, I was lucky to talking her into marrying me and we have been married 49 years and it will be 50 in February of 2010 and we have three daughters. DeLee came first and Jennifer who is married to Fritz Kiersch and Wendy. I am proud of all of them. I love them all.

JE: And they are working with you?

LAS: Two of them are. One of them works for Fred Hall here in town, part of Fred Jones who was a car dealer here in town, a famous one.

Chapter 8 ·2:40

Politics & News

John Erling: Along the way Governor Edmondson talked about pride in our flag?

Lee Allan Smith: Here again, Howard Edmondson was a fraternity brother. I bet you are getting sick of hearing that.

JE: No, it's interesting.

LAS: He was a fraternity brother and when I got out of college I ran with him, helping as much as I could with that prairie fire that he started. That's what he called it, a prairie fire. He had that E-D-M-O-N-D-S-O-N spells Edmondson.

JE: That was his campaign prairie fire, that's what they called it?

LAS: Yes, a prairie fire. So it lit pretty nicely. He got elected and he had a lot of fraternity brothers helping him and I was one of them and we had fun. I was single at the time. We had a great victory party at the state fairgrounds in Oklahoma City. We had a lot of

visitors coming in and a lot of movie actors and actresses from California that came in and helped. I was with the television station there and we televised it. I called him one time. It seemed like there wasn't much patriotism, not that you have to sell patriotism. But we discussed it and he agreed to call and have May 1 through May 7 be "Fly The Flag Week". You couldn't do this today, because the antennas go down on the cars when you turn cars off on so many of them. But we bought 50,000 little antenna flags and we did quite a promotion. We did a half time show at the spring game in Norman. All of those flags were gone primarily through the WKY promotion, but we talked Humpty Dumpty stores at the time into buying many, many of the flags to get them displayed on homes and on businesses. It was very, very successful. Howard was pleased that it turned out so well. He had the flags put on all of the highway patrol cars. That was 1960. Later, we did a little bit bigger things for the Stars and Stripes Show that started in 1969.

JE: You were president of the Oklahoma Broadcasters Association?

LAS: That was in the '60s, I think 1962 or 1963. At that time it was just radio only. It later changed and involves television too.

JE: But when you were assistant general manager of WKY and WKY-TV, you developed a news team and a sports department?

LAS: Well, I was the manager of the radio station and assistant general manager of the TV station. So I don't take credit for developing the news team. That was there before I got there with very famous people that went on to NBC for the most part including the weatherman.

JE: Do you have names?

LAS: Harry Volkman was the weatherman and there was Bob Thomas who was a weatherman. There were some news people and almost all of them went to NBC in New York or to Cleveland for NBC. Ross Porter I hired out of Norman. He left us quite early and went to LA and did the Dodgers for many years as well as the basketball broadcast for the Las Vegas team.

Chapter 9 - 3:05

Mickey Mantle

John Erling: Somewhere in here you established a relationship with a young man by the name of Mickey Mantle.

Lee Allan Smith: Yes, I met him briefly when I was stationed in New York and then he came back through here. He had a friend in town by the name of Youngblood. He called and

I went down there and got acquainted with him more. Later several things occurred where I would meet him at his restaurant in New York as I got to do one time when I was there and I got OETA to do an interview with him, which he agreed to do. He was a character. He was crazy. A couple of things I do remember, when we did the Olympic Festival, he was down there for it in the crowd of 85,000 people or so.

JE: In 1989?

LAS: Yes, in 1989. He got back and called me from a bar obviously and he said, "I have a bet with a guy here. I said that you did not pay Ronald Reagan to come to that Olympic Festival." I said, "Well, you won the bet Mick, but it cost us \$100,000 for security." (Laughter) so, he won his bet. He also came for many of the golf tournaments. Swing for Sight that I mentioned earlier that Bud and Barry were involved in that I kind of managed. And later he came here for the Stars and Stripes Golf Tournament. He came here for a lot of things. His mother lived out in Midwest City at the time and he would go out there and give her some money and all. Then he would always let me play down at Preston Trails, his private club down in Dallas when we would go down to the OU-Texas game. He would ride around with us down there. Later, right before he died I was talking to him and somebody from a children's medical research organization called me and said, "Could you get Mickey to do a tape about his experience with the children's hospital?" They saved his life and I didn't know this. For some reason, I was never told this. As a child he was over near Tulsa. They didn't have anything they could do for him. He had this problem with his knee and they were going to have to amputate his leg. His mother called what was back then called the Crippled Children's Hospital. It's called Children's Hospital today. So I called Mickey and told him about this request and he said, "Sure I'll do that. They saved my life and they didn't even charge me anything." But they found something they happened to have here called penicillin and it saved his leg and saved his life and then he went on to have that big career. So, I remember him agreeing to do it and still have the tape. We've got it and they have used it forever. Later I called him and said, "I know you'll let me do it, but we want to put up a statue of Mickey Mantle at the new ballpark that we opened." And he would go back and forth and he would say, "I'm too ugly," and all of this stuff. Well anyway, we put the statue up and we had Marilyn his wife come to look at it and to tweak it and all of that. He was really proud of it when we sent him the picture, but he never did get to see it go up. We had all of his old ball players come here and they respected him including Whitey Ford and Yogi Berra and about 20 other ones that you could name, Moose Skowron and Hank Bauer etc. His son said, "This is one of the nicest and best things that has ever happened and then they put in a restaurant across the street called Mickey Mantle's restaurant. So, we had a good time together in golf and discussion and I miss him. He was a good friend of Bobby Murcer who I miss more just because I saw him more and loved him.

Chapter 10 - 1:17**Restaurants**

John Erling: You were also in the restaurant business in the 1960s weren't you?

Lee Allan Smith: Never get in the restaurant business they tell you. When I was stationed in Germany we were on a baseball trip to Berlin and they had a wonderful bar and you would sit in a booth and you would look across and you would see a table number like 163 and you would pick up the phone and call them and ask her if she wanted to dance. They also had a thing where you could write out a note to them and you would send it over to them like department store chutes and you could send it to them. Anyway, that gave an idea to me when we got back. We bought an old grocery store that this elderly couple was selling on Boyd Street. We bought it and three of us put in a restaurant called Across the Street. We used those phones as our unique way of ordering the food rather than going up to order at the counter and then they would page you. This way a light would come on in your booth to tell you that your food is ready and you ordered it by phone. So it was very successful. We eventually sold out and opened up a couple of other restaurants that did fine. I opened one called Daddy's Garage. I was over in Tulsa and driving back on old Route 66 and stopped along the way and saw all of these great things that I thought could go in that restaurant. I came home with a boatload of equipment to start that restaurant and so several of us did that. That was a nice experience too. (Chuckle) They did a lot better with it because it's now called The Metro and it's one of the hot restaurants in town.

Chapter 11 - 5:53**Bob Hope**

John Erling: In the 1960s the Vietnam War was raging and was very divisive and our flag was being burned and you can take it from here because that bothered you.

Lee Allan Smith: Well, it was just a frustrating time being brought up the way I was. Again you know there are people that are just as patriotic as I am and don't feel like they've got to do anything to show it, even fly the flag or wear a pin. But, I was at the First Presbyterian Church one day and our minister was talking about patriotism. I just started thinking and reading a little bit. I didn't listen to the rest of the sermon very much but I went home and I knew the guy that had ran the Myriad Convention Center and asked him to

give me a call the next morning and see if it was available on June such and such date. That very day I even called Washington, D.C. to find out about a U.S. Army Band. It's kind of funny with the connections. I got a hold of a guy by the name of Jimmy Rowland who was from El Reno, Oklahoma. So for our first three shows we had the Strategic Air Command Band from Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska. But that was just the beginning of the planning of it all. But I knew we would have to have a place to do it and I knew we would have to have a band and I could build up from there and you had to get money to do it. But the first thing we did was to call all of the Oklahoma City broadcasters, radio and television, and formed the Oklahoma City Association of Broadcasters. Now, we talked earlier about the Oklahoma Broadcasters, but this was just Oklahoma City. So we all chipped in to do it. We wanted to do a Stars and Stripes Park, which is still out here and going quite well. We had a Bob Hope Pavilion out there and Red Skelton came out for it. But we started building that show and we syndicated it John on about 200 stations in the late 1960s and early 1970s. So when we tried to get it on NBC, they wouldn't do it. But when they saw that most of their 200 affiliates were NBC stations, they were getting preempted and taken off their programming. So they agreed to do it only if we sold the spots. They told me how much they would be and we sold them all and it kind of shocked them. So long story short, we were able to achieve network status. It was on NBC for several years. It was on from 1969 until 1976. In 1976 it was a two-hour show, but we were able to get Bob Hope and Dionne Warwick and Kate Smith and Les Brown's Band and Ed McMahon and Tennessee Ernie Ford and on and on. I could name even more if you wanted me to, but that gives you an idea.

JE: These were 4th of July performances?

LAS: Yes. We did it on the 4th of July the first year and you got in free if you were wearing red white and blue. Later, when we were on television we had to tape it and edit it for broadcast on July 4th. I remember Bob Hope didn't do the show with us in 1976. He had his own show. I kidded him about this and I don't mean to be dropping names but we did talk quite a bit strangely enough because he was always a hero when I listened to him on the radio. Our ratings were better than his, so that was fun. One interesting thing with Bob Hope, when he came after a few years when we finally were able to entice him to be here, it started out at the State Fair at the arena. Fortunately, we finally went down to the Myriad. But every time he would come, we would always follow the circus. The circus drew a lot of flies and they were all over him and they were all around him and he was yelling at me saying, "Lee Allan, can you do something about the flies?" Well, we did. We got some sprays and some fly swatters, etc. We finally rented a great huge, air-conditioned mobile home and we kept spraying around it so when he went into his dressing room there weren't any flies in there. So that was a kind of memorable

experience. The other one was when Red Skelton was here one of our first years we were going. They had started an Honor America Day in Washington, D.C. They weren't having like they are doing today great shows out of Washington with fireworks, very moving shows. We started Stars and Stripes in 1969 and they started having Honor America in about 1971. We had Red Skelton and they called and said, "Can we get Red Skelton to come from Oklahoma City to be on our show?" At this time we were prerecording it and then editing it. We said, "Okay we can put him on early and when we edit it we can do it in the afternoon. But what can you do for us?" They said, "Well, we're sending a plane out there to pick him up." I said, "Do you have somebody on your show you can send to us?" And they sent us Jim Lovell the astronaut. So we had a little trade going and I thought it was a cute story.

JE: Yes. Bob Hope, you were around him quite a bit.

LAS: Yes.

JE: Talk to us about him a little bit. If it was just the two of you, was he always dropping one-liners? Was he funny all of the time or just when he performed?

LAS: No, I wouldn't say so. I had so many people to deal with, but I was with him quite a bit. But I had Sugar Smith who was a detective in town with the Police Department that took care of him, particularly after the first year. Because I had to get him a masseur at 2 in the morning and I had to get him lemon pie, which he liked. None of that was a problem. I've had to deal with service people like that with Eddie Fisher who wanted everything. But Bob wasn't always firing one-liners all of the time but he was fun and he laughed a lot. He was very fun to be around but he didn't talk about himself a lot. He was mostly getting a lot of jokes from Sugar Smith. I might have given him a couple. But he was a very decent human being. It was funny. He didn't have a plane for a long time. He would call here and say, "Lee Allan, I am going to be in Wichita, Kansas, can you get me a flight to Dallas?" And we were able to do that. That's kind of why he came. But here again it's the connections. I had a friend Don Klosterman, who I was in the service with in Munich. He was a great football mind. The last job he had was as the head guy for the Los Angeles Rams. I was playing golf with him at Bellaire and he introduced me to Les Brown and the Les Brown connection turns me into getting Bob Hope and others because he had Fred McMurray playing with him, so Fred McMurray comes for a golf tournament or two. So it's these connections. It's not me. It's just that I knew people that could help me and help make things happen.

Chapter 12 - 3:08
Stars & Stripes Park

John Erling: Dale Robertson, Oklahoman.

Lee Allan Smith: Yes. Dale was early on with us on the Stars and Stripes Show. I respect and appreciate Dale so much because he was a great actor and certainly a celebrity in Oklahoma. For him to stay in Oklahoma means a lot to me. I mean, I know that some people have to move out to continue their work. But Dale stayed around and God bless him. I don't know how he is doing these days but I don't think he is doing real well, but my prayers are with him.

JE: Out of these Stars and Stripes Shows, you developed the Stars and Stripes Park?

LAS: Yes.

JE: Talk to us about that and the plazas and the pavilion.

LAS: Well, I thought there was a lot of land space around Lake Hefner as there is today and has been expanded by restaurants and so forth. But this particular area, I was driving down there, maybe 50 yards from the water and my car got stuck in the mud. I didn't have a cell phone so I walked all the way home and it was quite a little trek but that was the beginning of it, seeing this land available. So I went to Mayor not Ron Norick, but Jim Norick at the time.

JE: That would have been his father?

LAS: Yes, his father who is still living. He was instrumental in getting these people at the city who would said "no" to change their minds. They said no because they thought people would throw trash in it and it would pollute the water. I credit him with getting through that with the Water Resources Board. We started raising money and we had playground equipment. We raised enough money to have fantastic equipment and picnic benches and we put a Pavilion up and we called it The Bob Hope Pavilion. There's a statue out there now and you can see the brass on it because everybody rubs his nose. Red Skelton came in for it and we had a great experience out there with Bob Hope. There are 50 state flags around the Plaza. It's a great success and today the Public Parks Department in Oklahoma City is remodeling and fixing it up after all these years in a first-class way. So I'm really pleased with that.

JE: Eisenhower Plaza?

LAS: Eisenhower Plaza contains the 50 flags around the Plaza. As you walk in, there is a little bust statue of Eisenhower and about 20 quotations from Eisenhower of great patriotic expressions and of other people too I should say.

JE: Did you ever meet President Eisenhower?

LAS: I did not. I met Nixon Reagan and Ford.

JE: Tell about meeting Nixon. Was that here in Oklahoma?

LAS: Yes, it was out at the airport. He heard about The Stars and Stripes Show and he came in and I went out there with a friend of mine Bob Hoover. We met him in this holding room that they have there and we had our picture taken with him.

JE: Ronald Reagan, you met him?

LAS: Yes. I met him at the broadcasters meeting in Vegas. It was when somebody ran up the stairs and up to the podium and scared us all to death. I was sitting there with Ed Gaylord and several other people. He, in his own calm way, just kind of ducked and moved back and let the Secret Service do their job. But I met him there and then he came in as I think I mentioned for the Olympic Festival in 1989. Before he went to the Olympic Festival, we had him at the Cowboy Museum at the time and had picture-taking opportunities there and so he could view this great museum here. Then we flew him in Harry Meinders chopper along with Bob Hope to the track and field in Norman so he could come on across to the stadium. So, obviously I greatly admire that president and enjoyed that meeting.

Chapter 13 - 3:55

1989 Olympic Festival

John Erling: Students will be listening to this, and other people in your profession. How did you raise money and when people would say no to you, how would you take that rejection?

Lee Allan Smith: I took it as best I could as though they had said yes, unless, unless I knew that they had the money. That's a handful of people and I certainly wouldn't mention who they were. Some people say, "Oh, I gave too much already. I've given to this and this and this." Well, having worked on those events I knew that they hadn't, so. Anybody that says no, that's his or her right and we don't know what they are doing to take care of their parents or their church or whatever. So no, there's no way that I ever was upset that people said no. It's just that some people really are big, big people, like huge CEOs or owners of companies and it does bother me when some do not partake in the community activities and think let the other guy do it. But I never was upset at anybody saying no.

JE: You never took it personally?

LAS: No, of course not, no I never ever took it personally. Maybe I should have, I don't know. I didn't. I really didn't.

JE: The Oklahoma City Zoo, they named an elephant after you?

LAS: No, it was a little worse than that. It was a hippopotamus. (Laughter) It was a hippopotamus. I was much larger at the time. I guess they could still name it after me for weight size, but I was a lot bigger around then. So they did that and I took it and accepted it and it was fine. I think it's a great animal. (Laughter)

JE: But you did so much for the Zoo and that's why they did it.

LAS: Yes, I suppose so. I raised money for various projects and the main one was Aquaticus, which came in with a bang and went out, unfortunately, with problems. We brought in dolphins and sea lions and the sea lions are still there. The dolphins had some problems with some illnesses and some day I hope it comes back. But it's still a fabulous facility. Yes, I was involved in Aquaticus.

JE: We've talked a little bit about the 1989 Olympic Festival and we were all so proud of that. You had a part in getting it here to Oklahoma City?

LAS: I had a part and as is the case in anything I do, it takes lots of parts. The Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce and Paul Strasbaugh whom we lost here recently. Several of us went to Reno to make this bid along with Clay Bennett. I think that a lot of the success in getting it had to do with the fact that we were celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Land Run of 1889. Consequently the Olympic Festival was in 1989 so we were fortunate to get it. We came back and Clay and I talked and we talked to his father-in-law-

JE: His father in law was?

LAS: Ed Gaylord. I was the president and Clay Bennett was executive director and did one heck of a job. Most of my duties were with raising the money to put it on and that was very successful with the help of a lot of people. Clay and Tim O'Toole, who was the guy that ran the operations under Clay, and a lot of other fine people were involved. There are too many people to mention, but Clay did a great job. I also was heavily involved in the opening and closing ceremonies, but we all pitched in with that. That's when Mantle came in a little early and fortunately, I was able to sit behind my desk and force him to sign about 50 baseballs, which I've gotten rid of all of them but three. Don't call me, I am going to give them to my daughters. (Laughter) But, you mentioned a minute ago John about students maybe hearing this conversation.

JE: Yes.

LAS: I just hope that whatever I have said and will say is helpful. But I must say, that I spoke at Gaylord Journalism School down in Norman the other day and I was mentioning some of these people like Tennessee Ernie Ford, Ed McMahon and Bob Hope and Johnny Unitas and they looked at me like they thought I was from another planet. They didn't know whom the heck I was talking about. So I quickly started talking about some people they might know that came for The Spectacular and some other shows we've done like

Carrie Underwood or Rascal Flatts or Flaming Lips or All-American Rejects. So, I finally connected with them so I hope that some things from this interview they hang on to.

Chapter 14 - 3:12

Fundraising

John Erling: You had a knack for raising money. Not everybody can do that. I think most of the time you just picked up the phone and talked to them.

Lee Allan Smith: Most of the time.

JE: So, some have that knack and some do not. Do you even know what it is about you that helps you to raise money?

LAS: No, I will try to say it to you. I think first of all that be bold, be brave, don't be afraid. And I guess, since my mother didn't like the word guts, but intestinal fortitude. Stand up. Because first of all when you do it, I want to know in my own heart that it's a great project. I want to believe in it. I am not going to go out and raise money for something that, oh it might be okay but-I have to really believe in it. So I think with enthusiasm and that kind of an attitude you have a better chance to do it. I could never raise the money going and knocking on doors like most people professionally do. But I knock on wood that I am lucky to just do it on the telephone or I'd have no idea what I would do. The biggest source of anything that's happened for good for me is that telephone. That's been it for me. But you cannot be afraid to call on people and feel confident in your product and be respectful to them and their time. I always try to take good care of them too. I mean, they say, "I don't want any recognition." Well, they are going to have it because I want people to see these people later and say, "I want to do something for the community like these guys did ahead of me. So don't put Anonymous on any deal that I do, if you would please. I tried that before with somebody for the Boy Scouts one time. He gave me a million dollars. I won't name him. He said, "I don't want anything with my name on it." I said, "Keep your money then." I had my fingers crossed. He gave it and we put it up and he is proud of it. Since that time he has done four more big deals. But anyway, we try to take care of them and honor them, so that they are honored by their children and grandchildren and they see what that person has done to help out the community.

JE: Did you ever have what would be considered a big amount of money that you are going to ask somebody for and you just cringe because you think-I am going to ask this guy for \$50,000 or \$1 million?

LAS: You know, you are exactly right. Because I started out selling YMCA for the North Side Y and if I would get \$35 or \$50 I thought man that's good. So sure, as this started to grow and the projects got bigger and you got up to \$25,000 or even \$5,000. There again, you just take a deep breath and move on. I think the biggest one I got was from the Noble Foundation for Aquaticus. I was overjoyed. I was out in California vacationing and John Snodgrass who was then head of it called me and told me that. I think it made me live a better life for quite a while and I remember Homeland came in with \$1 million for the Olympic Festival for them to all have tickets sold at Homeland with their name on it and so forth, but in between that time, there was the Cowboy Museum and on and on. Those big bucks are just as easy for some people as asking for \$100.

JE: The Noble Foundation, was that \$1 million dollars?

LAS: Yes.

JE: Was that your ask?

LAS: That was the ask, yes.

JE: You asked for a million dollars?

LAS: Yes. You can say how much did you leave on the table. Well, you never know, do you? Had I asked for \$2 million, I may have gotten it. But anyway, that's a tough call.

JE: Do you remember if that was your first time asking for a million?

LAS: That was the first time for that much, yes. The second time was Homeland.

Chapter 15 ·4:08

Oklahoma Celebrities

John Erling: Okay, just talk about some of these people. I think we already have talked about some of them. James Garner?

Lee Allan Smith: James Garner is one of Oklahoma's greatest heroes. He has stayed with us and he comes back and he is an OU football fanatic for the Sooners. He grew up in Norman, Oklahoma and I remember meeting him for the first time when I was down at a pool hall, and he is pretty good by the way. He came back every time we asked him to. He came back for the 75th anniversary of the state of Oklahoma for the Diamond Jubilee. We put a Garner statue down in Norman with the help of a lot of folks down there but that was a Centennial project. But he came in for our parade for the Centennial. His health was not as good, but he wasn't going to miss it. He's come back for everything we have ever called him about, particularly on those golf tournaments. He loves to play golf and he's very good at it. He has a very good friend by the name of Bill Saxon who lives in

Dallas now and he would always come back and play in our golf tournaments, the Vince Gill Golf Tournament, Swing for Sight and Stars and Stripes Golf Tournament.

JE: Patti Page from Claremore, Oklahoma?

LAS: Patti kind of site in there with James Garner as far as coming back for so many things. Patti was here for our 50th anniversary of statehood and the 75th anniversary in 1982 and she came back for The Spectacular in 2007. She has always been most willing to come back and to honor her state.

JE: Roger Miller helped you too?

LAS: Yes, Roger, I didn't know him long enough. The first time I met him, I had him at a broadcasters meeting over in Tulsa. I had the art department over at Channel 4 make him a nice little king's hat for King of the Road, which made for a good publicity picture. You know how that goes John. He was a great guy and he died too soon. He was very talented. You've have heard some of his crazy songs that he has sung.

JE: Was he an Oklahoman?

LAS: He is.

JE: You can't roller skate in a buffalo ranch.

LAS: That's right, King of the Road.

JE: Johnny Bench, we haven't talked about him?

LAS: Johnny is truly an Oklahoman. He loves this state. We put a statue up for him that he loves. It's behind home plate at the ballpark downtown. He joined us at the Rose Bowl when we had floats, which the state put on, Tulsa and all of us. We had two floats and we had an all-star 150-piece marching band from all over the state of Oklahoma. We had dancers from Oklahoma City University. We had all of these great Oklahomans riding on these floats. Johnny Bench along with Patti Page and the governor and on and on. Johnny joined us there and he also joined us at Macy's and rode on the float in the Macy's Parade. He came in of course for The Spectacular and co-hosted it with two Miss Americas. He did a great job for us on the parade and then he was a part of The Spectacular on Statehood Day, November 16th 2007, introducing one of our celebrities. He is always willing to come back. He has missed a couple of golf tournaments because he is kind of busy. Early on I met Johnny Bench with Bobby Mercer whom I already knew. When I was at WKY Television we were doing a little segment after the World Series games. Oddly enough, one or two years or so, the Yankees and the Cincinnati Reds were not in the World Series. So I was able to get Johnny Bench and Bobby Murcer to come out and do a segment talking about the World Series game that day, which was generally in the afternoon at the time so we could do that in the evening. I'll never forget both of them were really, really good and I think I gave them \$100 a piece, which they accepted because they weren't getting paid that much anyway. I'm kidding!

But I remember Johnny Bench noticing, and it wasn't brought out until the next day. He noticed that one of these guys ran inside the first base line running to first base and it should have been called out because it was a very critical part of the game. But anyway, that's where I first met him and then later we met up a lot of times.

JE: It's interesting how Oklahoma shapes all of these people that you talk about here. We have Bench, Murcer and Mantle and they were just simple ordinary guys weren't they?

LAS: Yeah. Yeah. They really were. Of course you've got the king of them, the greatest athlete of all time is Jim Thorpe, which all of these people were in the Jim Thorpe Hall of Fame out there on Lincoln Boulevard that just opened. But there are a lot of athletes that have come our way that we have had the honor of calling Oklahomans.

Chapter 16 - 7:04

Edward L. Gaylord

John Erling: A little bit about the Gaylord family. Let's say for the record here that they are publishing family and company of The Oklahoman and The Daily Oklahoman. The founder was E.K. Gaylord.

Lee Allan Smith: Correct.

JE: But then you got to know his son the best.

LAS: Yes.

JE: Edward L. Gaylord, talk about your relationship with him and how you became friends.

LAS: Well, when I worked at WKY Radio and Television, I wouldn't say that we were good friends at that time. I worked for him and I found him to be a very reasonable person when I would have periodic lunches with him. The thing that I would say the most about him to begin with, which is so important, is that he gave us the tools to work with. He gave us the state-of-the-art equipment to do our jobs. He never faltered from doing that, including keeping the facility in good shape. If we needed a new front wall or new equipment, he provided it, so I always respected that. Then as I left for a couple of years to go with WKY Radio only. I started to have a closer friendship with him and then I was brought back, partly with his help I believe to be the president and general manager of WKY, which was then KTVY. It's now known as KFOR. He was a very important man to this community. He was controversial to some, but certainly not to me and to most of those people who knew him well. He did a lot more for this community and its people than most people know. But I did get to become friends with him and we would break bread on many occasions and take trips. I saw a very down to earth guy that liked

to work in the garden in his khakis. He was wonderful to his wife Thelma and he was absolutely tremendous to his daughters, Mary and Christy and Louise. They married wonderful people. Two of them still live here. All of their husbands have gone on to do wonderful things in the medical world and certainly in the sports world with Clay Bennett investing and bringing The Thunder to Oklahoma City. But I miss him greatly and I always wonder WUEGD? That stands for What Would Edward Gaylord Do when I get into a jam, because he was a very sound thinker and I miss him greatly.

JE: You would ask him for advice more than likely?

LAS: Yes I would, and he would give it to me. Sometimes I didn't always like the advice. (Laughter) But no, he was a wonderful person to me and to my family. I hate it when there are other people that might not have had such a good fortune to know him, and maybe thought differently. He was a true gentleman. He had a great sense of humor. A lot of people didn't realize that, but he did. He helped me. When I was raising funds it was always nice to be able to say, and I didn't always do this, I didn't have to finally, which was nice, because the projects would speak for themselves of the past. But it was nice to go ahead and say, "Well, Ed Gaylord has given to this." And that helped me a lot to get others fall in line. I didn't use it, I'd just give them the facts, because generally, I did go to him with the idea of not only the project but how much are you going to give? He was an outstanding person. He was helping us keep that baseball club here. He sent me out to try to see if I could get some money from the community to buy it and I said, "Well first, tell me what are you going to do?" Of course we are back to the million, when you said I asked for a million, but he volunteered that much and more.

JE: A million for keeping the ballpark?

LAS: Yes. And Clay Bennett entered into the situation and helped complete raising the money to make it a reality and keep the ball club here, the RedHawks now, it was called the '89ers at the time.

JE: Right. He used his newspaper of course to support issues within the community. Was he one that talked about them a lot with you or did he talk politics or anything?

LAS: We would talk politics, sure. Everybody knows he was a conservative, but I've seen him come out for and vote for Democrats. He was a registered Democrat, I believe, until the day of his departure. But he was a conservative and proud of it. Yes, we would talk and joke and laugh and discuss, as he did with his family and I am sure some of his other good friends.

JE: You said earlier that he contributed to the community in ways that maybe the community doesn't know. So, would he maybe give money or?

LAS: Yes, I've seen him slip a check in a guy's pocket. As an example, I don't mind telling one of them. I was over in Tulsa for I believe it was a diabetes award and he was the honoree.

So it was a roast and I was one of the roasters. It was pretty hard to roast a guy that you were working for, but I had gone to work for WKY only at that time and so I was able to roast him okay but I never will forget they raised a lot of money. But I saw him slip a check into Zarrow's pocket.

JE: Into Henry Zarrow's pocket?

LAS: Yes, into Henry Zarrow's pocket. It was a little extra amount for the cause. There's nothing in the paper about that and there are several of those that happened. Willie Shoemaker, I will tell you one about Bill Shoemaker. He had that terrible accident, the great jockey. And I saw him do the same thing to his wife (gave her a check). I'm not trying to say that he did that every day to somebody, but he just had a big heart and he had a thing about him that he wanted to do things for people. Mostly in a larger way like the YMCA and the United Way and the arts and all of that and hospitals. He had a big thing for a hospital out of Denver. It wasn't serving Oklahoma all that well except the people from Oklahoma were going to this great hospital in Denver to get care.

JE: So then after 31 years with WKY and Channel 4 it was time to move on. You turned to Ed Gaylord for advice and talked maybe about starting an advertising agency.

LAS: Yes, he was suggesting that and he said at the time to move on. It wasn't my suggestion. Let's just put it the way it was, I was released. Knight Ridder hired this fellow from Florida. They had seven stations. He removed six of them. One was close to him. We were doing fine. I'm not trying to justify it. I never was bitter about it. I thought that I was getting a calling and maybe God was sending me someplace else to be frank. Knight Ridder owned it. They bought it for \$80 million dollars. They sold it for \$40 million two years later under his leadership, I'm glad to say. But anyway, I did move on and so I was fortunate to come to a company where I am now, Ackerman McQueen and Oklahoma Event Marketing Company, which is a subsidiary of Ackerman. I can say that the transition to Ackerman, particularly after a few months really became a wonderful, wonderful place to work. I probably won't be around with Ackerman for many more years. But I can honestly say that Angus, in a lot of the same ways as Ed Gaylord, gives his people the tools and the state-of-the-art equipment to do their jobs.

JE: Yes.

LAS: I hire the right people, but for them to have state-of-the-art equipment to make it work. He also believes in community involvement and is happy that that I along with Ed Martin, who is the president of Ackerman now, do things in the community. Angus is a very, very bright person, very laid back. He is not one to go out and about as much as I have done in the past and as Ed Martin still does today, along with a retired Ray Ackerman, who was also a great community leader in his day not only while he was with the organization, but as a retiree, Admiral Ray Ackerman.

Chapter 17 - 5:02**OK Events**

John Erling: In 1991 you had a Welcome Home Celebration for Oklahoma troops that were returning from Desert Storm?

Lee Allan Smith: Yes, we had at the State Capitol grounds and some of the names were very popular at the time, so I can't remember all of them. But we had Argus Hamilton here. We built the stage with the American flag and it was a very heartwarming ceremony with the music that was played.

JE: In 1993 you brought the Will Rogers Follies?

LAS: Yes, that was the most fun of all. I mentioned earlier you take care of your sponsors. You also take care of you are guests. Because you ask them back, just like your sponsors. We do a great job of giving them hospitality. Will Rogers Follies for example, the whole crew when they got here that night we had a big dinner in Rotunda of the State Capitol. The next day we went down to Norman because they had the day off and I have tickets for all of them to see the OU Nebraska game. Every night we took them some different place that was enjoyable. I saw an article in the San Francisco Chronicle where were some of them were asked "where have you been and what have you liked?" and they all were saying, "Oh, we'd like to go back to Oklahoma. The were so good to us." Well, that's what we want to hear. That way, if one of them ever becomes a star out of that group, we invite them and they want to come back. So we do that. Like in the Stars and Stripes Show, we gave Steuben pieces and headdresses to Dionne Warwick and to Kate Smith and to Johnny Unitas and so forth.

JE: Keith Carradine was starring in that?

LAS: Yes, he was starring in it and we have private home for he and his wife to stay in. It was a beautiful home. It was the Hulsey Home out here to the east was a private home they stayed in. We also had Bob Hope staying in private homes.

JE: The MAPS project that Mayor Ron Norick initiated, the Metropolitan Area Projects. You were involved with promoting that?

LAS: Yes, I was involved in it. Mayor Norick deserves a great deal of praise. I might add that the Oklahoma City Chamber deserves a lot of credit too. Many, many people, helped with that, Ken Townsend and many others. I was involved in it, in putting on the opening show to kick it off.

JE: You helped raise funds for the Oklahoma City Bombing Memorial?

LAS: At first you know we didn't have hardly any money to operate. So I raised a few little dollars to get us on the road, and then later raised some more.

JE: And then, we don't have time to mention them all, the opening of the Civic Center Music Hall in 2001?

LAS: Yes, that was a great experience too. You know, luck's involved in a lot of things that we do. Luck in weather for the parades you know. We check it out for the five years previous in that area to see what the experience has been. But in this instance, I won't call it luck. I will just tell you the facts. That was held on September 6 through 9. On Tuesday, we went downtown to the Mayor's Office to get a pat on the back if you will. And when we went down there all of the TVs were on because that was 9/11. Had happened the week before that never would've occurred to even talk about. I don't want to call that luck because it wasn't luck at all. It was a tragedy and a terrible thing.

JE: No, we understand.

LAS: We had Bill Cosby here and we had a show going on in the Thelma Gaylord Performing Arts Center and upstairs at the Meinders Hall of Mirrors. So we worked around the clock during those four days and it was fun, great fun.

JE: You participated in raising money for the dome on the Capitol?

LAS: Now, Ed Cook gets a lot of credit for raising the money for the actual dome. We put on the dome dedication, which was a tremendous success by a lot of people. We did it on the north side of the Capitol. We had Vince Gill and Amy Grant. We rushed police escort for The Music Man downtown that was being played at the Music Hall. We had to rush them out to do a number on stage for that. It was a great evening. We had three of our Ms. Americas there. Later, you know we grabbed some at the Centennial and we had five. But the three Miss Americas sang selections and segments from the musical Oklahoma! We had a lot of celebrities there like Sean O'Grady the boxer and Bob Kurland of OSU basketball fame and Bob Fenimore, the football All-American and many, many more. But it was just a delightful evening. Some of the highlights were all of those the people and what started it off, which was the jets flying over, which always grabs me. Another highlight was the fireworks show, which went on for about 40 minutes I think. It was probably the best fireworks that most of the people there had ever seen in their lives. It was really, really tremendous. It may be aired again on OETA and you will get the pleasure of seeing what we all saw live.

JE: Adding that dome and we must say that Frank Keating the governor was I suppose the major champion of that?

LAS: Oh yes, I should-doing this program with you John is great because you are very good at leading me to try to remember. Frank Keating was the star. He was the five-star general of that whole thing and he was the one that wanted to bring it back after all those years because we didn't do it when we first built it. He was the igniter and the one that I had started any help from others to raise the money like I pointed out.

JE: And now it's just amazing, about every place you are in Oklahoma City, you can always see the dome.

LAS: Yes you can. I knew a few people that didn't like it that I won't name. But today Blake Wade laughs about it. He was involved in that and he said that everybody that he runs into now says "Oh yeah, I was for that." You can't find anybody that was against it. But I know a couple of people and they will admit today that it's one of the best things that we've ever done because it truly is an outstanding asset for our community and our state.

Chapter 18 - 8:45

Centennial Celebration

John Erling: We had the big celebration for our centennial in 2007 and you were right in the middle of all that and raised a ton of money for it and created ideas. I'll let you talk about it, but is it one of your biggest events?

Lee Allan Smith: It has to be called the biggest because it lasted for five or six years in planning it and pulling it off. We just didn't do it in 2007. We started out early on by putting the Centennial Train at the Zoo and a beautiful water fountain downtown in front of the theaters. So, as they say, what's your favorite is what your last one was. But there are so many good things that have happened that I have been involved with all of these volunteers and the sponsors and all. But yes, that has to be the biggest one because of the time and the money and planning that went into it. It started with its own dedication, which we have already talked about. But from then on there were just great things that occurred throughout the five or six years. But the main guy to mention 10 times, so play like I am mentioning him 10 times, is Blake Wade the executive director, who pulled me in to do it. I wouldn't have done it I don't think with anybody else except Blake Wade. I love our legislature, but I didn't really have to deal with them. I would go with him and they all were great to us and we couldn't do it without them. But Blake Wade worked with them and made it possible for me to spend my time trying to come up with ideas and doing the things to raise the money and planning it. One of the things that stands out as a major theme within the framework of the Centennial was getting the stamp. We went to the Post Office in Washington, D.C. four years before to work out getting it here. We appointed George Nigh to work on that. We had a great grand opening of it at the Cowboy Museum. That was a great theme. I think we had a song written by Jimmy Webb with Vince Gill's music called Oklahoma Rising. It was a great song. It wasn't a replacement for the musical Oklahoma! That's not what it was about. It was just

to celebrate and talk about how great this state was. They did a beautiful job. We had a great opening of it at the music hall. We then later put that song along with 40 other songs from great Oklahomans, starting with Gene Autry to Roger Miller that you talked about to Patti Page and all the ones that have gone before us, many, many of them. Then later, with Carrie Underwood, Toby Keith, Vince Gill, Reba McEntyre, Rascal Flatts, Brooks & Dunn. How lucky we are in Oklahoma to have those many talented musicians? I know that New Mexico and Arizona are coming up with their 100th anniversaries in 2012. I don't think they have done a thing yet. It's unfortunate because they ought to be proud. It makes me proud of Oklahoma because we were proud to do it and do it right. But I was looking at some of their people who they might get, like we just named and they are just few and far between for great people. So we are very lucky to have so many great artists. But that CD sold and all of the proceeds went to Habitat for Humanity, so we accomplished a lot of good with things like that. Like the fountain downtown, we call that the United Way Plaza, drawing in the things that are important to a community, whether it be Tulsa or wherever it is. Some of the other things of course that came along faster were three Macy's floats with all famous Oklahomans on it except the third year we had the OU Band. But the first year we had Kristin Chenoweth singing Oklahoma. We had Sandi Patty from Oklahoma City who moved back to Oklahoma doing the song Oklahoma Rising with all of these heroes on the side. The next best thing was the Rose Bowl. We were blessed to have two floats. It had never happened before in the history of the Rose Bowl. We did the opening number with Kristin Chenoweth also singing their theme song. Coming Down the Prairie was the Rose Bowl president with Miss America number four (from Oklahoma) Jennifer Berry. We owned it. We had the all-star band, 150 strong from Tulsa, Jenks to Ardmore to everywhere all over the state. We bought their uniforms and they looked great. We had a very good surprise on one of our floats where a rocket man came out of the ship depicting Oklahoma Rising. It brought the house down. It was unbelievable. We had all of these great people, Jim Thorpe's family. We had the great Clem McSpadden and his wife who has since died. The Board was all there and the governor and all of the many celebrities from Oklahoma. Then we had our own parade in Oklahoma City and that was fantastic. We had folks from all over the state. We had big, giant balloons and sometimes things happen like we were worried to death because we couldn't find enough helium. Fortunately, we found it with about a week to go and we were okay. But there are things that happen like that. It was going to rain like the dickens too. Here again, luck played a role. We were great until about 30 minutes after the parade was over and people dispersed and it started sprinkling and raining. Then the big finale was The Spectacular and I know I've left a lot out in between like statues and murals and things like that.

JE: And it was throughout the state in virtually every county you had a—

LAS: We had a thousand events and this is Blake Wade more than anybody and his people and his staff. I would like to credit his staff and Georgiana Rymer and on and on and my staff with my two daughters that worked for me DeLee and Jennifer and Erica Reed. But all over the state we had a thousand different events and projects. Whether it was statues or clocks, clocks were a big deal. More than 100 of them placed around the state. So the state from corner-to-corner was all covered in some way, with a bench or I don't care what it was, they all celebrated and that was important for the state to be involved. There are a lot of things in between that I didn't mention, but the finale was The Spectacular. You looked down the list we had and you have to see it to appreciate it, and I know that OETA plans to run it again. It was on OETA before. It was headlined by the Oklahoma City Symphony Orchestra. We had Carrie Underwood, Toby Keith, Vince Gill, Reba McEntyre and Kelli O'Hara, an up and coming star. She is expecting a baby now, but she just finished performing in a Broadway Musical and she is a fabulous entertainer. She graduated from Oklahoma City University, as did Kristin Chenoweth. We had Blake Shelton and Jimmy Webb and the list goes on and on and on. Most of them were Oklahomans and then we had three outsiders that fit the part. One of them was Shirley Jones who started in Oklahoma, who was delightful and loved being here. We had Willard Scott who related to the 100-year-old people as you can imagine because of the TODAY show. We had something from Ron Howard who was from Duncan, Oklahoma. All in all it was dramatically successful with fireworks, pyrotechnics and confetti. It was the show of all shows. That one I truly am extremely proud of. This show wasn't just done by Lee Allan Smith and Blake Wade. We hired a company that happened to be a Gaylord Company called Corporate Magic out of Nashville, but their headquarters are out of Dallas. The point man was from Oklahoma, a guy by the name of Steve Dalton. They also worked with us when we hired some people out of Atlanta for the parade. You have to go where you need to go to get the best you can get. So it's not a bow for Blake and Lee Allan, but a bow for all of those people that I mentioned, stars that come from Oklahoma and sponsors and literally thousands of volunteers.

JE: And in the closing ceremony in the Ford Center, there is one star that I will always remember.

LAS: Who is that?

JE: The Eagle.

LAS: Oh my word! Yes, he stole the show along with the trapeze guy.

JE: Right.

LAS: Yes, you are as right as you can be. You know, it's a funny story, before the show we had a little press conference. We introduced them all. They were all in there, every one of

them except for Toby and Reba who had to be getting prepared. And I said, “These are all great people and great stars and all of them are from Oklahoma” with the exception of the three that I mentioned. But I said, “The star is this person right back there that’s holding this little animal, this little bird.” And it came out and brother they had no idea it was coming but it brought the house down.

JE: I can still see that bird flying in.

LAS: I can too.

JE: It was wonderful.

LAS: It was outstanding.

JE: Then you coordinated also between Tulsa and Oklahoma City the great fireworks.

LAS: You know Blake had volunteers all over the state. I can’t name them all. I can’t name all of the events, but they did a lot of things over in Tulsa. We each gave each other as a memento. We gave them a clock and they gave us a beautiful statue of ribbons in downtown Oklahoma City. But Tulsa kicked the Centennial year off in November of 2006 with a dramatically moving and powerful fireworks show with images on the buildings. Sharon King Davis and Don Walker and Howard Barnett and Paula Marshall, they did yeoman work and were very instrumental in all of the things that went on over there including the great Centenarians and all of those folks that were 100 years old or older.

JE: It brought the state together didn’t it in a big way?

LAS: It really did. It was kind of like the Olympic Festival when we did the torch run. That was a little bit more meaningful to bring it together, but I think everybody for the most part was very much behind the deal and the celebration of the state.

Chapter 19 - 4:04

Ray Ackerman

Lee Allan Smith: One of the other major projects, that’s an ongoing project, but in its position at this time it’s still very impressive and that’s down in Bricktown. On the canal we have installed several pieces of the Run Monument, celebrating the Run of 1889. There are probably 25 pieces down there now with a team that put them up. It’s very, very impressive. The sculptor is Paul Moore from Norman, Oklahoma. It’s got buggies and horses and guys on horses and pretty soon they will have one where one of the horses is falling and the horseman is falling off. It’s very dramatic. The first piece was a big buggy that had two horses rearing-up as they were getting ready to enter the canal or the

water in the Cimarron if you will. But anyway, it's a dramatic scene. It's being visited by people from all over not only our state but the United States. It's really something that one would want to see visiting Oklahoma.

John Erling: And you had a hand in that as well in raising money?

LAS: Yes, that goes way back. Ray Ackerman and Stanley Draper had that dream of wanting to do that going back I think 30 years ago. But when we had the Centennial, I wanted to revive it and it was under a different sculptor. The one that had planned it with them had later passed away. So we had Paul Moore draw up another plan for it. We set out raising funds to get the first three. Ed Gaylord, Kerr-McGee and Herman Meinders all chipped in to get it going. Then the state, city and the federal government all chipped in along with some other individuals to make it all happen. It's very educational to go down there and see it on the granite and it tells all about the Run and who made it happen. It's something that I hope that anybody listening here will go see because it's part of our state's history.

JE: About Ray Ackerman, some words about him. How do you see him and reflect on him?

LAS: Ray is one of my very best friends. He has done a great deal over the years. He came here from Pennsylvania. He comes in here wearing his Pittsburgh championship jacket when they win for the sixth time like they did last year. He has a great sense of humor and he is very talented. He started working at The Oklahoman selling ads. He left that to start working for another company and then eventually he met Angus McQueen and his late father Marvin and together they formed Ackerman McQueen. For a while it was Ackerman Hood McQueen and included a fine fellow from Tulsa, but it's back to Ackerman McQueen now. Ray has been retired for some time now. He did a great job while he was here and made a great many friends to keep the contacts going for Angus and for me when I came on board later. Ray is very proud of what Angus has done to build the company into what it is today with a long list of great clients that he enjoyed. Ray is a visionary. He is proud of making his roots here. An interesting story, I enjoyed getting to know him because his brother-in-law was Bill Beck. He was a big baseball guy. The first guy to do a lot of things like put a midget up to bat to make them get walks because they couldn't pitch to him in the strike zone. Ray is a dear friend and a great guy and I hope he has many more years to be of service to us. He has been active in many things, certainly Rotary as president. But he's Mr. United Way and he could be called Mr. Allied Arts and he could be called Admiral as he is. He had a great deal with bringing the canal and mainly the river, which we used to mow years ago. With Ray's vision and help from many people, as it takes, and he would tell you the same thing, but he gets a lot of credit for having the water in that river.

JE: And he helped lead the charge to change the name from the North Canadian River to the Oklahoma River.

LAS: Yes he did. Fortunately, we had to pull Ray back, not to get the whole thing called the Oklahoma River, because that was swimming upstream. He was wise enough to listen to the point that we should focus on renaming the seven miles where we are now doing all the canoeing and the boating and all the things that are going on down there. He still wished it was all known as the Oklahoma River. But yes, I'd rather go downtown to our event and rather than promote Canada, I would rather it promote Oklahoma too.

Chapter 20 - 4:54

Thank You, Lee Allan

John Erling: You know you were given a gift, a personality gift, that's the way I would see it. You can't even see it but you know you have a charisma. You are able to make friends easily. You are able to get people to sign on to a project and that's something that you can't teach. So as students listen to this, and think, well I want to be an event promoter like he is...is there some of this that unless you have it you can't do it?

Lee Allan Smith: I'm not so sure I would say that John.

JE: Okay.

LAS: Because I want to be as honest with you as I have been so far. Many people say, "I want to be honest with you...like you lied." (Laughter) I am trying to tell you that I had an inferiority complex. I don't say that to many people, but I did and I don't know what happened.

JE: As a youngster?

LAS: Yes, I did. I had problems with this and that and the other and they are not important to talk about, but I did. I had an inferiority complex. After my father died I was in a little bit of a shell. My mother was a dear lady and she helped me so much. But I don't think that I have that great of a personality. I think that I kind of want to go back and say I'm sorry that I talk so much. Because sometimes you can think you have a good personality and you overdo it too much, which I am probably doing now. But all I am saying is that I think you can change because I wasn't a glowing personality and I don't think I am today. I really wasn't. I was around my friends and my fraternity they helped me develop. And then I went to college I think the first thing that opened me up was that I was the MC of the Sooner Scandals, which was a great program down there. I still every once in awhile have been back. And I had to try and be funny and play the piano, I still knew a couple of songs then, but they were crazy songs. So, if I have a good personality, I can't tell you that I do. I can just tell you that I enjoy being with people and reminiscing with people and having the contacts that I have. I have had a lot of sad things, but I've had some joy

and I do like to laugh. And having three daughters and a wife that don't look up to you as being the king keeps me in place. I think I am able to not have an inferiority complex, but to try to be myself and to be natural and to hopefully have a good personality but I'm not sure I do.

JE: The key is that you loved people and you loved being around people. Not everybody does that. You loved being with people.

LAS: Yes, that's for sure.

JE: But then overall, you love Oklahoma and you love Oklahoma City.

LAS: DeAnn, my wife, she thought when I had an offer to go to New York, to Philadelphia, to Los Angeles and to Denver, to name four, the first time she had a few tears, but when she found out I was not about to go anyplace for any amount of money.

JE: Were those offers because of radio and television?

LAS: Radio and television, yes.

JE: Did you ever consider them?

LAS: I really didn't. Oh, and Tacoma/Seattle, I was offered to go there too. But none of them came close. Some of them were with Gaylord and some were not. The Denver one was a guy by the name of Elroy McCaw. I've been to his home in Seattle out on the water. He wanted me to come and work for him. I knew him well enough to know, bless his heart, I loved him dearly, but he'd come in and there would be meetings John, you remember him. I never knew if DeAnn was going to go or not so I would have two queen beds and I would come back in and he was always in the other bed. He was so tight it was unbelievable. So I knew I wasn't going to go to work for him even though I loved him. (Laughter) But it turned out that the Chicago Tribune bought that station which has done quite well.

JE: You would never leave this great state?

LAS: I would never leave this city or state. When I go on vacation I always say, "This is the best place I've been this week." When I get back from California or Las Vegas or New York. I enjoy going, but I am glad to get back because this is the place and not just Oklahoma City. I don't have that many friends all over the state but I have a few and I really do. I know this sounds corny but I love it all.

JE: And so that's the way you'd like to be remembered?

LAS: Probably.

JE: Have you thought about that and how you would like to be remembered?

LAS: No, no. I don't think about how I want to be remembered, I just let people say what they want to. Some would say some nice things and some might say some bad things. I might always say that I like the one on the tombstone that says, "See DeAnn, I told you I was sick." (Laughter) That's one of my favorite ones. No, I don't have any. Just that I enjoyed my state and its people.

JE: Well, if I can say on behalf of Oklahomans and maybe Oklahoma City people, they were really fortunate to have a Lee Allan Smith living in their midst because a lot of these projects would never have been accomplished if you didn't have a lightning rod or somebody with the gift that you have, and not every community has that. Many others have said the same thing in this town. They are lucky to have a Lee Allan Smith and that's a pretty high compliment.

LAS: Well, I appreciate it John more than you know. It's nice to have this conversation with a broadcaster because I don't think most average Joes could do the job to get the things out of me like you did. So, I thank you for your compliment and I thank you for your interview.

Chapter 21 - 0:24

Conclusion

Announcer: Now you know what Lee Allan Smith means to Oklahoma. It is our hope that future event planners will take inspiration from this interview as they celebrate the many future accomplishments of our state. Please consult our For Further Reading Section and our Bookstore for more information on the life of Lee Allan Smith. Brought to you by the generous sponsors of VoicesofOklahoma.com